



AT THE SIGN
OF
THE FOX

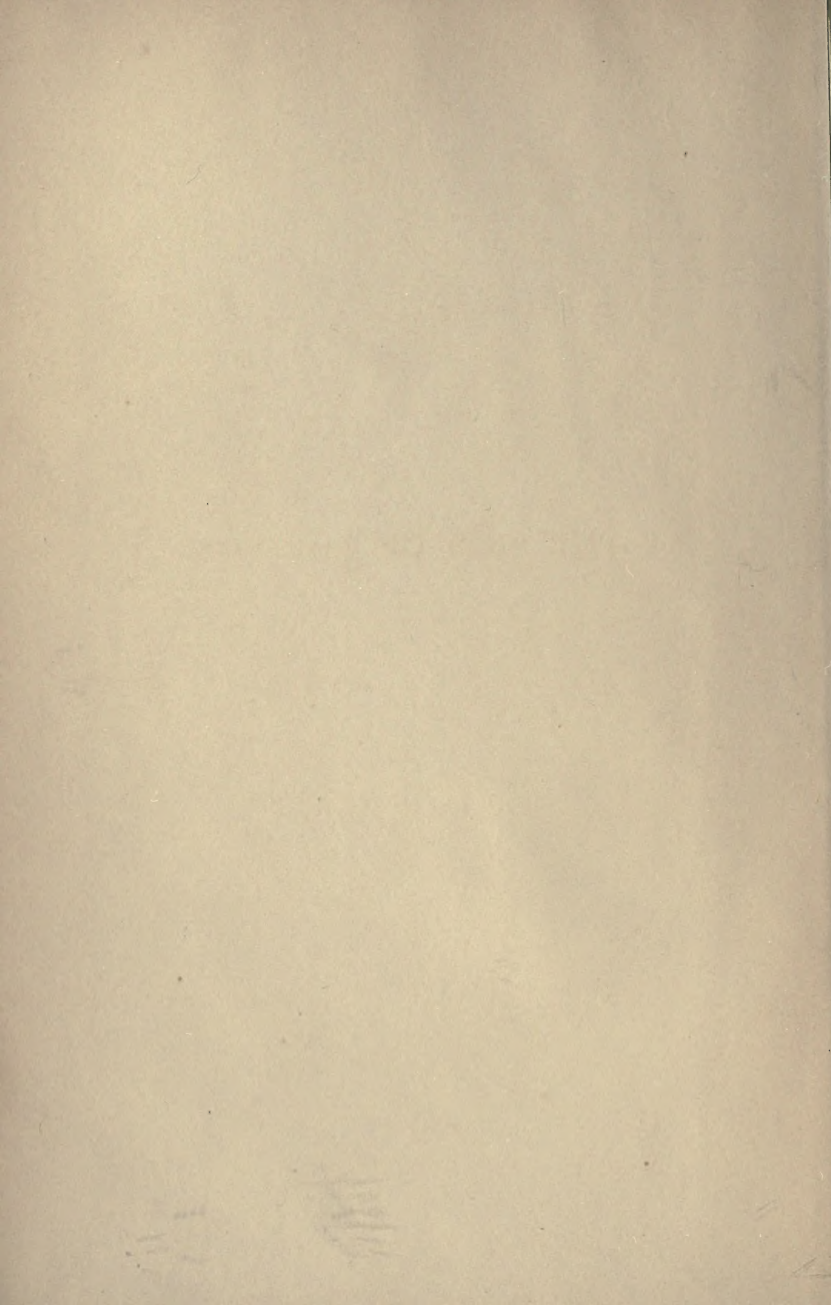
by

THE AUTHOR OF
"PEOPLE OF THE WHIRLPOOL"

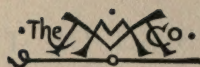



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AT THE SIGN OF THE FOX





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AT THE SIGN OF THE FOX

A Romance

BY

BARBARA (pseud.)

AUTHOR OF "THE GARDEN OF A COMMUTER'S WIFE,"

"PEOPLE OF THE WHIRLPOOL," AND

"THE WOMAN ERRANT"

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7.4.49

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

LONDON: MACMILLAN & CO., LTD.

1905

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Set up and electrotyped. Published July, 1905.

PS
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W62A8

Norwood Press

J. S. Cushing & Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

This Book is for the Brave



PRATE NOT TO ME OF WEAKLINGS, WHO
LAMENT THIS LIFE AND NOUGHT ACHIEVE,
I HYMN THE VAST AND VALIANT CREW
OF THOSE WHO HAVE SCANT TIME TO GRIEVE,
FIRM SET THEIR FORTUNES TO RETRIEVE,
THEY SING FOR LUCK A LUSTY STAVE,
THE WORLD'S STANCH WORKERS, BY YOUR LEAVE—
THIS IS THE BALLADE OF THE BRAVE!

— RICHARD BURTON.



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THE PEOPLE

- BROOKE LAWTON . . . A Young Woman of To-day, who sees Things as they might be.
- ADAM LAWTON . . . Her Father, a Country-bred New Yorker of Affairs.
- PAMELA LAWTON . . . Her Mother, a Brooke of Virginia.
- ADAM THE CUB . . . Her Brother, at the Difficult Age of Sixteen.
- KEITH WEST . . . Adam Lawton's Maternal Cousin, who stayed at Home.
- LUCY DEAN . . . Brooke's Friend, who sees Things as they are.
- MRS. ENOCH FENTON . . . A Cheerful Cripple.
- SILENT STEAD . . . Sportsman and Misanthrope.
- MARTE LORENZ . . . Idealist and Artist.
- TOM BROWNELL . . . Engaged in climbing the Ladder of Journalism from the Bottom Rung.
- HENRY MAARTEN . . . A Farm Hand working on Shares.
- DR. RICHARD RUSSELL . . . Of Oakland, Friend of Stead and the Lawtons, and Confidant-general of the County.
- THE PIEMAN . . . A Travelling Optimist.
- TATTERS . . . A Person, though disguised as an Old Collie Dog.

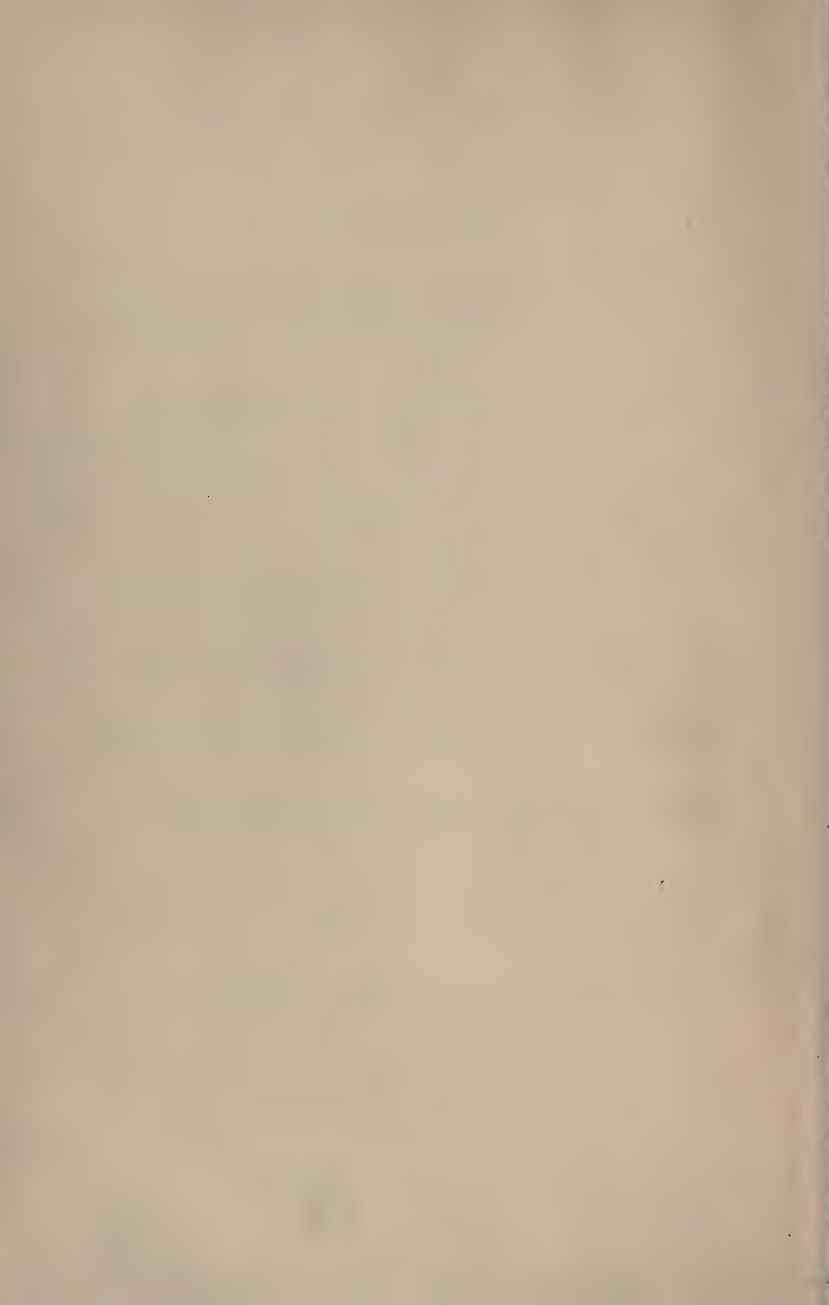
The Usual Critic's Chorus, composed of Citizens, Villagers, Male and Female, Commonplace, Eccentric, or Otherwise.

TIME

The Present Century.

PLACE

Manhattan and the Hill Country of the Moosatuk.



AT THE SIGN OF THE FOX

CHAPTER I

THE RIVER KINGDOM

ROBERT STEAD and Dr. Russell, clad for hunting, tramped down a pent road through the woodland and halted at the bars that separated it from the highway.

Like careful woodsmen, they made sure that their guns were at half-cock before resting them against the tumble-down wall; pulling out pipe and tobacco pouch, they filled and fingered the smooth bowls with the deliberation that is akin to restfulness. Then, face to windward, they applied the match and drew the few rapid puffs that kindle the charmèd fire, and leaning on the top rail, looked down the slope to where the river, broad and tranquil as it passed, narrowed and grew more elusive as the eye traced it toward its starting-point in the north country many miles away.

For more than a hundred miles between its throne in the hill country and the sea travels the Moosatuk, and all the land through which it passes is its kingdom. What its stern mood was in the ancient days when as

an ice-floe, maybe, it tore a pathway through the granite hills, fortressing them with splintered slabs and tossing huge boulders from its course, man may but guess; but to-day a wild thing, half tamed, it obeys while it still compels. Above, below, confined by dams, it does the will of man; and yet, flow where it will, man follows, with his mills, his factories, his railways, until, by spreading into shallows, it half eludes his greed. For twenty sinuous miles it follows a free, sunlit course, now running swift and lapping the banks of little islands wooded with hemlocks, now stretching itself on the smooth pebbles until it tempts the unwary to the crossing on a bridge of stepping-stones. For all this space the ferns and wood flowers stoop from the slanting banks to snatch its lingering kisses, the wood folk drink from it, the wild fowl sleep on it, and its waters bear no heavier responsibility or weight than driftwood or the duck boat, that steals silently forth, a shadow in the morning twilight, like the Mohican canoes that a mere century ago plied the selfsame waters.

Such is the Moosatuk where it passes Gilead, a peaceful village halfway between Stonebridge and Gordon, with its farmsteads filling the fertile river valley and climbing up the hillside as if to shun railways, until from below the topmost are lost in the trees, like the aeries of some furtive hawk or owl of the woods. This was the scene which lay below the hunters as they

paused to rest in the October noon glow before returning to Stead's lodge on top of Windy Hill.

For a little space neither man spoke. In fact, the last mile of their walk had passed in silence save for the occasional smothered exclamation of the younger hunter, when he came upon a snare, now and then, and broke it. Even the dry leaves lay untouched in their tracks, for the foot of a woodsman seems instinctively to avoid the dead twig and leaf-filled rut.

The dogs, two brown-eyed, mobile Gordon setters, well understanding that the signal of stacked arms and the smell of tobacco meant that the day's work was over, started unchidden on a private hunting-trip, nosing about through the ground-pine and frost-bleached lady-ferns, and paused with tails swinging in wide circles before a great patch of glossy wintergreen, where a ruffed grouse or shy Bob-white had doubtless made his breakfast on the pungent scarlet berries. Out in the little-used highway, October, herself an Indian in her colour schemes, had set her loom in the grass-divided wheel tracks, a loom of many strands, wherein she wove a careful tapestry of russet, bronze, crimson, gold, and ruby from leaf of beech, sumach, oak, pepperidge, chestnut, birch, and purpling dogwood, only to drop it as a rug for hoof tracks or fling it aloft at random, a bit of gracious drapery for the too stern granite.

Between these two men, neither young, as often happens between close friends of either sex, silence did not come from lack of mutual understanding. It is only the machine-made or undeveloped brain that mistakes garrulity for companionship and casts the blight of motiveless chatter upon the precious gift of silent hours, wherein the soul may learn to know itself.

More than fifteen years divided their ages, and their temperaments were wider still apart; you could judge this even from trifles, as the shape of their pipes and the way in which they held and smoked them.

Robert Stead, turning fifty, tall and well knit, had heavy, matted brown hair, beard cut close, and impenetrable eyes, whose colour no one could tell offhand, any more than he might read the meaning of the mustache-hid mouth. His firm walk and clear skin told of strength and present outdoor life; his slightly rounded shoulders spoke either of past indoor hours or the restless, flinching attitude where a man ceases to face the storms of life with chest thrown out and head erect as if to say to warring elements — "See, I am ready; come and do your worst!" "Silent Stead" people hereabout called him from his taciturnity, and he either held his short brier close against his lips and puffed between tightly clinched teeth, as if pulling against time, or in the revulsion let the flame die out until, forgotten, the pipe hung cold, bitter, and noisome between his lips.

Dr. Russell's pipe, a plain meerschaum of moderate length, held with light firmness, was smoked deliberately as something that soothed yet held in no thrall, and when its first sweetness passed, with a sharp, cleansing rap, he returned the pipe to his pocket. Though in the later sixties, the doctor radiated all the hope of youth. One realized that his was a face to trust, even before compassing its details; the easy turn of his shapely, well-poised head, with its closely cut hair blended of steel and silver, every glance of his searching gray eyes, that looked frankly from under eyebrows that were still black, conveyed both comprehension and sympathy. His nose was straight and not too long, and the thin nostrils quivered with all the sensitiveness of a highly strung horse, while the mouth was saved from the sternness to which the firm chin seemed to pledge it by a drooping of the corners that told of a keen sense of humour. In stature he was of medium height, but his shoulders were still squared to the burdens of life, and his erect carriage made him appear tall; but, after all, the secret of his youth lay in a quality of mind, the very quality that the younger man lacked — his steadfast faith and confidence in his fellow-men; this had lasted undaunted by disappointment during the forty years and more that he had held to them the closest, wisest, and most blessed of human ministries — that of the good physician.

The doctor's pipe grew cold, and placing it in one of the deep pockets of his jacket, he fumbled in the other as he turned to his companion, saying: "Was I not right, Rob? Give the city boys, with their automobiles and pretty clothes, and the trolley-car hunters, the first two weeks of October in which to moult their fine feathers, ruin their firearms and dispositions, and decide that the Moosatuk has been overhunted, and we may have the rest of open season to ourselves without danger when crossing a brush lot in broad daylight of being mistaken for wild turkeys or what not. It is the eighteenth to-day. We've tramped good twenty miles since daybreak, and whom have we met? A woman looking for cows, two men stacking slab sides, and some school children on the cross-road, while we've had our fill of air unpeppered by small shot, this glorious view at every curve and through every gap, and," freeing his pocket, "a brace of grouse, another of quail, and three woodcock as an excuse for our outing, in the eyes of those who insist that excuses, aside from the desire, must be made for every act.

"Strange, perhaps, that the killing and hunting lust should be an excuse. I often feel like begging pardon of these little hunched-up feathered things; but in spite of humanitarian principles, I somehow fear that we are growing too nice, and when the hunting fever dies out wholly, something vital is lacking in a man."

"Hunting fever or not," replied Stead, kicking a decaying log at his feet into dust, "I'd rather the woods were full of visible men with guns than invisible snares. Do you know that I have broken thirty or more this morning? Some day these setters of snares and I shall meet, and there will be trouble; it seems that I am destined always to war with the intangible." Then he spread his game on the fence, and though it outranked the doctor's spoils, he seemed to take no pleasure in it, but still looked moodily across the river.

"Ah, Rob, Rob," said the doctor, throwing his arm affectionately about the shoulder of the taller man, who leaned heavily on the fence-top, "will your mood never change? Can you not forgive and at least play bravely at forgetting?"

"It is ten years — no, eleven — since your child whom I tended died and Helen left you, or you her, whichever way you choose to put it. The why of it all you have never deemed best to tell, and I have never asked, trusting your manhood. She led her own life then for the four years she lived. I have managed to see you every year since, in spite of the drifting life your profession forced upon you. And since the railway's completion, when you settled here, I've spent a week of my holiday each autumn with you, hoping to see a change, believing you would waken and live your life out instead of moping it away. But no! Your work and old comrades

need you, and you still refuse. What is it, Rob? Life seems so good to me with the threescore and ten in plain sight that I cannot bear to see it playing through your fingers at fifty.

“Love may be gone, or clouded, let us say, but there is always work, and work is glorious! Get out of your own shadow, man, and let the sun pass. It is with you as *The Allegorist* says:—

“‘One looked into the cup of life,
And let his shadow fall athwart ;
The wine gleamed darkly in the cup—
It surely was of bitter sort.’”

Stead withdrew his gaze from the river and turned it on the face of his companion.

“I know it all, doctor, and much more than you can say. I know you’ve clung to me when no one else would trouble, and that you drive all those forty miles from home every autumn, rain or shine, to tramp the woods with me, to sit beside my fire and give me comfort, and yet— Do you remember the old adage, that ‘Life without work is water in a sieve’? but in the antiphon lies the sting, ‘Work without motive cannot live.’ It is motive that is dead in me. I think I have forgiven, I delude myself if I say I have forgotten, but, good God, doctor, can you imagine sitting and feeling yourself as useless as water in a sieve and *not caring*? That is my misery. If I could only really care, heart and soul, for

anything for one short month, I would give the rest of my life for it.

"I have not even the primal motive of hunger that sets the wolf a-prowling. The few yearly thousands my father left me have put that chance away, and my contempt for that form of cowardice precludes suicide. So I have actually come to be what passes current for content, with every one but you. Here I am, located for life on the hillside, with only half-breed José left of what was, with my books, which can neither dissemble nor betray, for company, and so long as I have food I shall have dog friends to follow me by day and sleep by me at night. Then, as long as eyesight lasts, there is my River Kingdom," and Stead stretched his arms, half to relax their tension, toward the silver fillet shimmering in the valley below, in which at that moment some white gulls, with black-tipped wings, hanging in the skylike clouds, were mirrored.

Then, giving a nervous, mirthless laugh, he whistled to the dogs, and as if led to speak of himself too much, he turned to action, and vaulting over the bars with but a hand touch, trailed his feet through rifts of glowing leaves, and reaching backward for his gun, said lightly, "Who was it, by the way, that christened this region The River Kingdom? Was it your daughter?"

"No, it was not Barbara," said the doctor, crossing the bars, but more sedately, his cheery temper relieved

at the change of theme. "It was Brooke Lawton, a cousin or niece or some such kin of Miss Keith West — a lovable child, full of both romance and common sense. Her father, Adam Lawton, whom you must have met in your capacity as a civil engineer, for he has floated many railway schemes, was born here in Gilead in the West homestead, his mother being of that family. Though he never comes here, and all the kin but Keith, a first cousin, are dead, some slight sentiment binds him to the past, and he has kept the little farm abreast of all improvements and leaves Keith in charge. A few years ago Brooke, his elder child and only daughter, recovering from an illness, came up and spent the autumn; and I, being here for the shooting and knowing Keith well, for she and my sister Lot were schoolmates at Mt. Holyoke long ago, was called to see her several times.

"But there was little that I could do for her, — indomitable pluck and dauntless spirits were her best medicine. Well I remember one gray, cold day, the last of her stay, I found Miss Keith in some alarm about her, as the child had gone out on foot over two hours before.

"As we stood consulting in the porch, a slim, gray-coated figure, with soft brown hair flying like a gypsy's, arms full of autumn leaves and berries, came swiftly down the lane between house and wood, and throwing

her load on the steps, gazed at it in a sort of ecstasy, from which she waked only at Miss Keith's words of chiding.

"‘I — lost?’ she queried, straightening her thick eyebrows into an expression of incredulity, ‘why, Cousin Keith, I’ve only been to my River Kingdom collecting tribute, but when I’m grown up and do as I please, I’m coming back here to reign and have the wild flowers bow to me when I pass and the little wood beasts follow me in procession.’

"I must have told you of it at the time, for I was stopping with you. Yes, it was Brooke Lawton who christened the River Kingdom, — but she never returned, and I heard indirectly that she had gone abroad to study art. Come to think of it, she must be a grown woman now, at the rate time goes. All of which reminds me that I sent word that I would go to Miss Keith's to-day; she wants counsel of some sort, about what I could not even surmise from her letter. As she is one of the good middle-aged women who always wish excuses made for every act, I will take her these grouse as an apology and tangible explanation as to my clothes and gun, and as she always insists that I should take a meal with her, you will not see me until supper-time. If you will tell José to dress and split the quail, I myself will broil them over the wood coals in your den, spitted on hickory forks. Metal should never touch wild fowl, but you of the younger generation do so

grudge trouble and seem to have no capacity for detail," and, half chiding, half laughing, Dr. Russell shouldered his beloved gun, picked up the grouse, smoothed the rumpled ruff of the cock bird, and started on the mile walk downhill to the West homestead, whistling.

Robert Stead looked after him a moment, and then, calling the dogs to heel, started up the hillside in an opposite direction. Before him for a single instant stood the form of the young girl of the River Kingdom, as Dr. Russell had portrayed her, with arms full of gay leaves and vines that she had stripped from the hedges as she went, but as he reached her she vanished, and turning toward the river itself, he was half surprised to find it still moving as ceaselessly as ever. Love had mocked him long ago and motive eluded him, but the dog at his side touched his fingers with caressing tongue, and the River Kingdom still remained.

CHAPTER II

A BELATED FIRST CAUSE

THE West farm was on the upper of the two roads between Stonebridge and Gordon, at the point where a steep uphill grade paused, on a plateau of several hundred feet in length, as if to rest and take breath and allow those who travelled upon it to drink in the splendour of the river view before attempting the still steeper ascent beyond.

Three generations of Wests had lived from this farm until, some forty years before, its hundred acres being all too small for the needs of modern push and life, the last young male of the family, a man of twenty odd, of tenacious mixed Scotch and New England stock, had gone to New York to follow a quicker game of dollars.

In due course, when Adam Lawton's parents died, his mother having been a West and the homestead her portion, he found himself absorbed in the beginnings of money-making, yet somewhere in him was a deep-buried sentiment for his boyhood's home, stern though the life and discipline had been, and even though he found no leisure to revisit it. He therefore had installed his maternal cousin Keith in it as guardian, paying the taxes

and for such improvements and repairs as kept it apace with the times. Then he promptly forgot it, except on pay days, when he justified himself to himself, the Scotch thrift in him insisting on justification, for the comparatively slight outlay, by saying half aloud to his private secretary, who did the forwarding, "A snug little place, and always worth a price; my daughter fancies it, and perhaps some day, who knows, I may like to go back there for a rest."

Thus it followed that Miss Keith and the farm had lived together for twenty years a life of almost wedded devotion. The sheep had disappeared from the hills, it is true, and four cows, a fat horse, and countless chickens and ducks represented the live stock. The cultivated ground had been reduced to a great corn-field, a potato patch, and vegetable garden, on whose borders grew fruits of all seasons, the rest of the land being sown down to rye or hay, while the woodland that protected the house on the north and east, being only required to yield kindlings, had returned to the beauty of a forest primeval, with a dense growth of oak, white pine, and hemlock, underspread with untrodden ferns, amid which, following the seasons' call, blossomed arbutus, anemones, moccasin flowers, snow crystal Indian pipe, and partridge vine.

Now, for the first time in all these years, Miss Keith was faltering in her single-hearted allegiance, and this

upheaval coming on her fiftieth birthday, too, gave it a double significance. At fifty one's ideas and person are supposed to be settled for life, but with Miss Keith her semi-centennial was the first occasion upon which she ever remembered to have felt thoroughly unsettled, and as she stood in front of the parlour mantel-shelf, arms akimbo, gazing at the *First Cause*, that rested against the wall between the fat clock and a blue china vase filled with quaking grass, she alternately frowned and smiled.

This First Cause was the highly finished cabinet photograph of a man, coupled with a suggestion of marriage contained in a letter, the edge of the pale blue envelope containing which peeped from under the garulous little clock that ticked vociferously the twenty-four hours through, and gave an alarming whir-r, suggestive of asthma in the depths of its chest, before striking every quarter and half, and mumbled a long grace before the hours.

The photograph was of a man past fifty, with a good head, large, wide-open eyes, and a broad nose that might mean either stupidity or a sense of humour, according as to how the nostrils moved in life. Very little else could be said of the face, for mustache and beard covered it closely, running up before the ears to meet a curly mop of hair that roofed the head. It was an attractive face at first glance, and the low, turned-over

collar, flowing tie that was barely hinted at beneath the beard, and loose sack-coat carried out the suggestion of strength, that was continued to where a pair of powerful hands, whose fingers rested together easily tip to tip, completed the picture.

Picture and letter had arrived three days before, and yet the answer to the latter lay in process of construction upon the flap of the old-fashioned bookcase in the window corner. Perhaps the cause for the delay was more in the fact that both picture and letter, though relating to the First Cause, had not come directly from him, but from his sister. She had been a school friend of Miss Keith's, who occasionally came to visit her and who was now living in Boston, having become the third wife of some one connected in a humble capacity with a free library in the city where the State-house dome seeks to rival Minerva's helmet, and whose streets ever coil in and out as if in classic emulation of Medusa's locks.

Taking the letter from under the clock, Miss Keith went to the window and re-read it for the twentieth time.

"October 10, 19—.

"MY DEAR FRIEND:

"It is only during the past year, since I have been living within reach and under the privilege and influence of all that is inspiring to one of my aspirations, that I have realized how lonely your life must be upon

that farm, where your only intimate associates are animals, feathered and otherwise, and evening, instead of becoming as it is with me the period of self-culture in the society of a loyal male companion, is too often a period of premature somnolence and apathy.

“Until now I have seen no method of escape to offer you, and so have held my peace. Two weeks ago, however, fortune smiled through a letter from my brother, James White, out in Wisconsin. You must remember James — the handsome man with curly hair who waited on Jane Tilley when we were at Mt. Holyoke, until she jilted him for William Parsons. He got over it nobly, though, and brought us paper flower bouquets the day we graduated. Mine was of red and white roses, and yours was all white. Surely you will remember — he said you looked ‘quite smart enough for a bride.’

“Well, you *were* pretty in those days, Keith, with your white skin and light brown hair, before you took on freckles; but, after all, dark complexions like mine wear the best.

“Now, to come to time — James is a widower. He has sweet children and needs a wife and mother for them. Though there are plenty of western women, and some that have hoards of money, out in Corntown, where his canning business is, he was always particular and peckish, preferring a refined eastern woman to influence his family. Knowing that I am living in Boston in the

midst of opportunities, so to speak, our home being half-way between Bunker Hill Monument and Harvard University, he has intrusted me to select him a wife. Your face appeared to me. Putting aside more pressing claimants, I wrote to him of the girl he once declared fit to be 'a bride,' and sent him your last picture — at least it's the last I've seen. He answered by return post. He has not forgotten, and he will, if you consent, come here the first of May to meet you and be married.

"Now, dear Keith, why not put your place on the market, and when winter sets in come here to me in Boston and see the world, spend a season of relaxation, hear lectures and music, and be thus attuned for matrimony in the sweet spring, when the horse-chestnut buds yield to the sun and drop their glossy shields in the Public Gardens?

"Your friend and sister-in-law to be,

"JUDITH W. DOW."

Straightway Miss Keith, the strong of body and heretofore of mind, the adviser of both men and women for miles around, Miss Keith, the capable, who, with help "on shares," made the little farm pay and lived a life of bustling content that was the opposite of somnolent vegetation, began mentally to chafe and rebel against the confinement and loneliness of her lot, and yearn for change, — she who had always preached and

practised that one's work is that which lies nearest to hand.

She ignored the freckle thrust and the phrase taking for granted that the farm was hers to sell. The words *music* and *lectures* seemed italicized, yet the strongest appeal in the crafty letter was its promise of human companionship, for she had often yearned for kin.

Miss Keith was of no common type, even among the many intelligent women reared on New England farms. She had struggled her way through Mt. Holyoke and fitted herself to teach in the Gilead school, where she had remained ten years, until, at the death of her Aunt Lawton, her cousin had offered to install her at the farm, where the active life indoors and out proved a strong attraction. During these years her clear, strong voice had led in singing-school and in the village choir, where it still held sway, — the fact that it was slightly “weathered” increasing rather than diminishing its power. Though pale of hair and face, at no time in her life had she been wholly unattractive, and her speech, sometimes lapsing into provincialisms when she was either excited or constrained, was wholly free of either Yankee dialect or nasal twang. She had met many people of all grades in due course, — farmers, manufacturers, prospectors, and the leisurely class of cottagers from Stonebridge and Gordon; but no man had ever said, “I love you.”

Seating herself at the desk with an unaccustomed drooping of the head, she finished the letter begun the day before, filling each of the four pages with rapid strokes, folded it without once re-reading, sealed it with a bit of crumby red wax that had not seen light probably since her Aunt Lawton had used it for the sealing of her will, and affixed the stamp with slow exactness precisely in the proper corner. Then with folded hands she leaned back and gazed at the missive, saying, as she did so, "That decides it. I will go to Boston the first of the year, when everything is closed up and settled for the winter. Farrish, below, can tend the stock. I've saved a little money to enjoy myself with, and when May comes, if James White turns up and we hold to the same mind, I shall marry him; if not — I suppose Cousin Adam will be glad for me to come back, that is, unless he makes other arrangements."

The alternative to the matrimonial scheme seemed just then of such slight moment that she hardly pronounced the words, but turned to leave the desk, when a sharp, compelling bark from the rug before the hearth made her start and brought a red spot to each cheek.

There before her sat a shaggy brown dog, setter in build, but with a collie cross showing in eccentricities of hair that formed a ruff about his neck and gave the tail a strange bushiness. A pair of great, soft, brown eyes were fixed on Miss Keith's face, and the expression

in them was accentuated by the slight raising of the long, mobile, silky ears, which seemed to ask a question. Meeting no response, the dog barked once more and raised one paw pleadingly.

Miss Keith, who had risen, seated herself again suddenly. "Why, Tatters, old man, I've forgotten your breakfast, and it is almost dinner-time. Where have you been since yesterday? Hunting by the river? You know you should not come in here with a wet coat and muddy paws. Down! Down!" she cried, as the dog, never moving his gaze from her face, crossed the room and, sitting on his haunches before her, rested his fringy wet paws on her lap.

"What is the matter? Thorns or burs in your feet?"

The dog continued to look at her steadfastly, giving a little whine meantime, but never a wag of his tail.

"Tatters!" she exclaimed at last, moistening her lips, which seemed to be unaccountably dry, "I believe you know what is on my mind, and what I've been wrestling with in the spirit these three days, — but it's all settled now, and my mind is free. Come, and I'll get your dinner bone."

"Settled!" and then the thought struck her, "What would become of Tatters?" A new caretaker might easily be found for the place and cattle, who would also understand the pruning of the cherished vines and fruit trees, but would he understand Tatters, and would

Tatters understand or tolerate any one not born of the family? As long as people of the West stock had lived in Gilead, with them had been a sturdy breed of collies and setters, whose sagacity and nosing power were famed throughout the country-side. Now, through chance and short-sightedness, the two breeds had merged in one, and Tatters, of middle age, wise beyond the dog wisdom of his ancestors, was its only representative.

Ever since his year of puppyhood, when Miss Keith with New England firmness had completed his house-breaking education, he had been the house man, guarding the picket gate by day, the door by night. In his responsibility of combining double natures, he herded young calves in a poorly fenced pasture, or tracked the turkey hens (those most brainless of feathered things) when they recklessly led their broods into the dark woodland in May storms. As setter, he ran free by the wagon when Miss Keith took eggs, butter, or berries to her various customers, dashing in among the hordes of English sparrows by the roadside, or going afield with cautious tread and circling tail to flush the flocks of meadowlarks with eager sporting fervour. As collie, with Scotch traditions in his blood, he followed her to meeting or singing-school, and slept under the pew seat or sat sentinel in the vestibule, according to season and weather. Then by the winter hearth fire he was Miss

Keith's counsellor, for in spite of the stoves that her Cousin Adam had supplied, her practicality of mind, and the labour it entailed, she had a primeval streak in her that yearned to see the heat that warms one. Tatters was the silent partner, it is true, in their discussions, and merely looked assent as he listened to the oft-repeated tale of short weight in feed, and the sloth of hired men as opposed to the thrift of those who work on shares, with perfect composure, yet let one of these hired men but raise his voice in unamiable argument with Miss Keith, and Tatters crouched to heel, upper lip cleared from his glistening teeth, ready for action, and no one ever braved the warning.

Then, too, he took the responsibility of beginning the day's work upon his shaggy shoulders. At six o'clock in winter, changing to five on May day, he left his rug in the outer kitchen, and going to Miss Keith's bedroom, nosed open the door, wedged from jarring by a mat, and after lifting her stout slippers to the bed edge, carefully, one by one, with many false starts and droppings, if she did not waken, he would sit down, and with thrown back head give quick, short barks until he had response.

How did he know hours and dates? How do we know that of which we are most sure, yet cannot prove by mathematical problems? He *did* know — that was sufficient.

As all these things surged through Miss Keith's brain, the First Cause on the mantel-shelf grew more remote, and folding her strong lean arms about the pleading dog, she rested her face against his head and began to cry softly, a thing unheard of.

CHAPTER III

THE DECISION OF MISS KEITH

It was while mistress and dog were thus absorbed that Dr. Russell, gun on shoulder, and grouse dangling from his fingers, came up the side road on the south that separated house and garden plot from the barn and outbuildings, that stood close to the lane edge, facing it, like a row of precise soldiers drawn up to give salute.

He expected that at his first footfall on the side porch his coming would be heralded by short, percussive barks,—Tatters' greeting to his friends. He knocked twice, then tried the yielding door-knob, and entered the kitchen, where various saucepans, boiling over madly and deluging the polished stove with an impromptu pottage, told of some sort of domestic lapse. Crossing the hallway, guided by a light streak toward the first open door, he entered the sitting room at the moment that Miss Keith had raised her wet eyes from Tatters' head, and was alternately rubbing them with her handkerchief, held in one hand, and looking at her answer to the disturbing letter, held in the other.

“Why, what is the matter, Miss Keith,—bad news or a love letter?” the doctor asked with the easy cheerfulness that showed how little real anxiety lay beneath the question. “The carrier said that you wished to see me to-day, and so I’ve come down, but I’d no idea that it was about a tearful matter, and one in which Tatters was too much involved to ‘watch out’ as usual.”

Taken thus unawares, an aggressive expression crossed Miss Keith’s face for an instant, but immediately disappeared under the influence of the doctor’s smile, and, quickly recovering, she answered, as she gave her hands into his hearty grasp: “It is both bad news *and* a letter. To-day is my fiftieth birthday,—you see I do not believe in belying the Lord’s work and concealing one’s age as some do,—and I’ve had a letter that I want man’s counsel upon.” Then, as a sound of liquid hissing on a hot stove and the smell of burning food came from the hallway, she remembered the time of day, the dinner in peril, and her duties as housekeeper, at the same moment, and mumbling a hasty apology, fled to the kitchen, followed by the doctor, who, after making the grouse serve as a birthday offering, wisely retired to the sitting room until dinner should be ready.

Once there, he made a few rapid but direct observations, beginning with the First Cause on the mantelshelf.

Then, as he saw the two letters on the desk, one envelope hastily torn open and bearing the signs of much handling, the other carefully sealed and lying face downward, he chuckled to himself. "Woman all through, Miss Keith, in spite of everything. Ten to one she has made up her mind and answered her letter while she was waiting for me to come and advise with her about it. At the same time, when the dinner is off her mind, she will tell me the whole story, and discuss it from the very beginning, for the mere pleasure of it; but no matter what I may say, she will post the letter already written." Then, going over to the bookcase that topped the desk, he unlocked the diamond-paned door, and pulling out a book at random, which proved to be a dingy copy of Hogg's "Shepherd's Calendar," he resigned himself to the inevitable drowsiness born of the volume and his long walk, and stretching himself on the wide haircloth sofa, was soon taking the "forty winks" that should sharpen his wits for the coming interview.

Fortunately he awoke before Miss Keith came to call him, for she had scant respect for either man or woman who was caught napping in broad daylight; and together they went out to the wide kitchen that served also as a cheerful dining room, with its long double window filled with plants and beau-pot of gay chrysanthemums on the table, the doctor meanwhile

offering Miss Keith his arm, half with natural, courtly deference, half in mischief, a frequent mood of his that old friends understood and loved.

At first Miss Keith, speaking clearly for the sake of breaking silence, appeared nervous. The talk ran lightly in general channels, — the glorious season, the shooting, the way in which the trolley line had turned the horse traffic from the turnpike to the upper road, and how much more life passed the West farm, Miss Keith telling that sometimes of an afternoon a dozen pleasure vehicles on the way from Stonebridge to Gordon, or the reverse, would stop on the plateau under the pines, combining a resting spell for horses with their drivers' enjoyment of the view.

Next Silent Stead and his bachelor housekeeping on Windy Hill followed in natural sequence. Did the doctor know the real story about Stead's dead wife, or if it were true that he was going away, back to his work as civil engineer again? Many visitors, men of weight from Gordon, had called on him that season, and the letter carrier said he had many thick letters with great red seals, and it was whispered that he was wanted to direct some new railway enterprise in the far West.

No, Dr. Russell could not answer, other than to wish the gossip that sent his friend back to the world's work might foreshadow the truth.

Then the doctor took the lead, asking home questions about Mr. Lawton and the other kin, saying, "I met your Cousin Adam last winter in New York one evening at the Century, where Martin Cortright introduced us. His is a keen and interesting face, though rather nerve-worn. As he stood among a group of financiers, that also deal liberally by the various arts, his eyes roved about, dilating and contracting strangely, as if they followed the workings of a dozen thoughts each minute, though otherwise his face remained unchanged and he never moved a muscle.

"Did I like him? He is not easy to approach, and it was only when I told him that, though living at Oaklands, I go inland every autumn for the hunting, and know Gilead well, also his Cousin Keith and West farm, where I had once seen his daughter Brooke, that his eye brightened and he showed any interest, while at the same moment some one whom he had evidently been watching broke away from a distant group, and, your cousin darting off to join him, our talk ceased."

"If Adam cares for anything but money-making, which I've sometimes doubted, it is for Brooke," said Miss Keith, quite at her ease again, the coffee that she was pouring being fully up to its reputation. "In fact, he deeded this farm to her on her twenty-first birthday, all on the strength of her girlish whim and talk long ago about the *River Kingdom*. This also

makes me feel uncertain about my stay here. What if Brooke should marry and *he* should wish her to sell the place? Not that Adam has ever said a word to me about the transfer, and he pays the taxes and what not just the same, but Job Farrish was looking up his boundaries last spring and saw the deed recorded in the Town House. In fact, Adam himself never writes nowadays, his secretary does it all; and even Brooke has only written once this year, and that was when I said the gutter having leaked, the north room needed new paper, and she sent it — pretty it is, too, wild roses running through a rustic lattice — she's always had an open eye for colour."

"What! is that gypsy child twenty-one?" exclaimed the doctor in surprise, pushing back his chair so as to pull Tatters' head between his knees and stroke his ears, at the same time that he drew his coffee cup toward him, sniffing the subtle aroma, only second in his nostrils to that of the fresh earth in spring and his beloved pipe. "It seems but a year or so since she was roving about the lane with her hair flying and Tatters after her, — the two were inseparable."

"Twenty-one! Why, Dr. Russell, that time was eight years ago, the second autumn you came up to hunt with Silent Stead. She's turned *twenty-four*, and that Tatters was this one's uncle; they say there has been a dog of the name in the family this hundred years and more.

"Yes, Brooke was twenty-four last May, and it seems now that they should call her by her rightful Christian name, Pamela, instead of that absurd one that might as well be stick or stone. You did not know she had any other? Oh, it is her middle name to be sure — Pamela Brooke Lawton. Her mother was one of the proud old Virginia Brookes, and they say, failing of male heirs in the South, they often call a daughter by her mother's maiden name. Mannish and affected though, I call it, still I must own it did suit her eight years ago, for she had as many ways and turns and deep and shallow places as that little stream on Windy Hill that begins in only a thread that wouldn't move a fern, and then widens to the Glen Mill-pond, and saws all the wood hereabouts and grinds the flour for Gilead.

"Yes, she has been here several times, though never to stay long; mostly she came with her great friend, Lucy Dean, when they were at school at Farmington. I never liked *her* though, she had a way of asking point-blank questions and calling a spade a spade that sent a chill through you."

"And what has Brooke been doing since she's been a woman grown? What, for the last four years?" asked the doctor, returning to the present with new interest at sound of Brooke's name.

"Let me see," and Miss Keith began counting on

her fingers; "after Brooke left school, she and her mother and father, with the Dean girl and the Cub, spent one summer travelling in the West, — Adam was nosing out some scheme or other. Then the women folks went to Europe for a year or more, leaving young Adam, the Cub, — that's what they call the boy, and I must say, poor lad, he does seem a misfit and hard to manage, — at a military boarding-school somewhere.

"The Dean girl had a voice that her people thought worth the training, though I never heard what became of it after, and Brooke wanted to go on with her painting. Oh, yes, she does really paint — doesn't just dabble colours together like a marble cake, such as most pictures are, and call it Art. Why, she got a prize, they say, in a New York exhibition for a picture of some children eating cherries. I've got a photograph of it, that she sent me, on my bureau. It's fine work, good judges say; all the same, to my eye it lacks one thing — it doesn't look just quite alive. If she was poor and had to work and kept on, I guess she'd get somewhere; but now she's at home again, and in society, and not being in need of money, I suppose she'll let the painting slip, except maybe to make candy boxes for charity fairs and such.

"Adam's always been too busy ever to have much of a settled home. They travelled about mostly of

summers, and since they left the house down town two years ago, where the children were born, they've lived in a big sort of apartment arrangement, half flat, half hotel, as near as I can make it out — 'It gives mamma no responsibility,' Brooke wrote in telling of it. But without some responsibility you can't get much home comfort, to my thinking.

"Now that Brooke is educated and at home, I hear her father is building a big city house and another down by the sea somewhere, and so perhaps — when he has money enough — he will slow up and take a rest. The Lawtons and Wests are both long-lived, and Adam never drank or dissipated, I guess; but I should think at the pace he's trotted these thirty years he'd be footsore by this, and like a back-stairs sitting room out of reach, and a loose pair of slippers."

Miss Keith grew more careless of her speech as she warmed to her subject, and Dr. Russell laughed outright at the idea of the Adam Lawton whom he had met, tall and distinguished, a bundle of steel nerves bound by will power, sitting to rest anywhere, much less in loose slippers out of the sound of the Whirlpool's eddying.

The fussy little clock in the sitting room, after making many futile remarks, like a choking *do-re-mi*, landed fairly on *do*, and struck four! Then Miss

Keith, saying casually that she must skim the milk at five, began to unfold her plan matrimonial.

She did not read Mrs. Dow's letter to the doctor, but spoke from memory, with which an unexpected quality of imagination blended with dangerous frequency.

Alack a day! How often are the overworked three graces, Faith, Hope, and Charity, pushed into the place of Truth, Experience, and Common Sense, and forced to bear responsibility not theirs!

When Miss Keith had finished, the good doctor naturally supposed that she had received a direct proposal from an old-time lover who, once rejected, had married some one else in pique. Also that the making of the sister's home the meeting place was her own idea, born of her maidenly regard of the proprieties, which regard he well knew usually strengthens in inverse proportion to the need for it!

Finally, as he arose to go, she said, hovering tremulously between kitchen and sitting room, "Now that I know that you agree with me, I will ask one favour more. I have a letter that I would like to have posted in Gilead by your hand; these outdoor letter boxes sometimes leak, you know. Then I shall sleep content."

"Most certainly," said the doctor, turning back, a smile crossing his face and lurking at his mouth corners

at this latest of many vocations given him — that of Cupid's postman, though he could not but admit that his age made him a peculiarly suitable assistant in such a belated wooing.

As he took the letter, he involuntarily turned it face upward, and glanced at the address, saying in a dubious tone, his eyebrows raised: "Mrs. Dow? Why not James White himself?" Then adding, with a touch of irony in his voice that Miss Keith missed, "Is his sister acting the kindly part of go-between? Ah, so! Well, Miss Keith, no one but yourself can settle so delicate a matter finally, *but* one thing promise me: go to Boston, if you will; jig and jostle, hear reform lectures and eat health food, and see life if you must; but for God's sake, woman, don't commit yourself until you have seen the '*sweet children*' and the man! Photographs can lie, as well as tongues!" Then, fearing he had been too harsh, he added kindly, "If you find that Tatters can't transfer himself, as you call it, let me know, — there is always room for one more dog at Oaklands, and Barbara will pamper him."

That night Miss Keith, buoyed by the doctor's talk and a man's recent presence in the house, albeit it was temporary, was in an exalted mood and trod on air. Already she saw visions of the future, and kept saying to herself, "I will do and see so and so when I go to Boston."

When she lit her candle and went upstairs, she took the First Cause from the mantel and bore him with her. Where should she put him? Her dresser seemed too intimate a place; the spare room album, too remote. Finally she placed the photograph against the puffs and quills of the pillow-shams of the best room bed and then fled to her own chamber, where she blew out the candle and undressed in the dark, or, rather, by the half moonlight, saying aloud, as she got into bed, "Thank fortune for one thing, I've kept my own hair and teeth, and such as I am there is nothing of me that takes off." And though the remark was apropos of nothing in particular, a wave of hot colour covered her face at the words, and she buried her head in her pillow and tried to sleep. This she didn't do, for Tatters, whom she had utterly forgotten for the first time, and shut out when she closed the door, resented being forced to sleep out on the porch at such a frosty time, and at intervals throughout the night bayed dismally at the moon, thereby calling to her mind an old ballad of chilling and ominous portent.

CHAPTER IV

INTERLUDE

ON a bright afternoon in early December a number of carriages and motor cars that usually entered Central Park via the Plaza promptly at four, continued to the right instead, and in impromptu procession slowed down before the entrance of a new house in the Park Lane section of the avenue.

The house belonged to Senator Parks, and on this day it was to be thrown open to that portion of the public selected by the social sponsors of his new wife. This wife, being a rather handsome California widow on the agreeable side of thirty-five, had acquired enough knowledge of the world during a three years' residence abroad to bend the knee gracefully, if not quite sincerely, to the powers that make or mar the fate of newcomers, at the same time always, so to speak, carelessly twisting in plain sight between her slender fingers the strings of a full purse.

The conventional "At Home from 4 to 7 o'clock," therefore, had more than the usual significance, for it was known to imply a concert in the superbly appointed

music hall, by singers from the opera, and an exhibition of paintings in the new gallery, so spacious that it ran from block to block, such a one as had never before been seen in any private dwelling in Manhattan. Then, too, there had been whispers of a *chef* of Gallic renown who had served two emperors and a prince, and altogether society, whose appetite is rather keen at the beginning of the season, expecting novelty or at least to be amused, was beginning to sally forth. It did not commit itself by so doing, and it assumed no responsibility other than leaving a card, by footman or otherwise, at the door, in due course; it merely gave itself the opportunity to pass judgment. But as the new hostess understood this perfectly well, and only desired the chance of playing her trump card to win the lead, it was a beautifully frank arrangement on both sides, in which no one was deceived.

As the hour passed the stream of carriages became continuous, the cavernous awning that swallowed the people as soon as they alighted being the centre of that strange mob, usually composed of fairly well-dressed women, who appear spontaneously wherever the carpet-covered steps and striped awning tell of an entertainment to be. No buzzard hovering in air drops to his prey more quickly than does the average idle woman catch sight of this emblem of hospitality.

Two young women, walking with easy, rapid gait up

the avenue, paused on the outskirts of the throng, uncertain as to the best point for breaking through. At least the shorter of the two hesitated, while the taller, after a swift survey, put her white-gloved hands firmly on the shoulders of a gaping dressmaker's apprentice, turned her about, saying, as she did so, "Let us pass, please," and instantly a way was opened.

These young women were simply dressed for the street, with no obtrusive fuss and feathers, yet each had an unmistakable air of individuality and distinction. They were both of the same age, twenty-four, yet the difference in colouring and poise made the taller appear fully two years older. She had glossy black hair, tucked up under a three-cornered hat, heavy eyebrows, from under which she looked one straight in the face with a half-defiant look in the steel-gray eyes. Her nose was aquiline, and her lips rather thin, but curled in a humorous way when she spoke. She was broad of shoulder and small of waist and hips; and it was only a shy curve of neck and bust that, judging from poise alone, prevented one from thinking Lucy Dean a young athlete masquerading in his sister's black velvet fur-trimmed frock with its scarlet-slashed sleeves.

Brooke Lawton, her companion, looked little more than twenty, was formed in a more feminine mould, and though half a head shorter, was still of medium height. Her hair, of the peculiar shade of ash brown with

chestnut glints that artists love, was worn rather loose at the sides and gathered into a curly knot at the back of the neck, under a wide brown beaver hat that was tied below the chin with a large bow and ends after the fashion of our grandmothers. Her eyes were dark brown, and yet a shade lighter than the brows and lashes. Her nose was not of classic proportions, being rather too broad at the base and inclined to be tip-tilted, but her mouth had a generous fulness that softened a resolute chin, albeit it was cleft by a dimple. Her long coat was of brown, so that the only bright colour about her was the vivid glow that the crisp air and walking had brought to her cheeks.

She also looked one straight in the eyes when she spoke, but with an entire lack of self-consciousness wholly at variance with the attitude of her friend. Brooke might be typified as a joyous yet shy thrush; Lucy, as a splendid but vociferous red-winged black-bird!

"Is your mother coming?" asked Lucy, as they went up the steps together.

"Later, perhaps; she has not been feeling very festive these few days past. In fact, she has been strangely spiritless of late; living in a hotel disagrees with her ideas of home hospitality. Father seems worried and has not been sleeping, — has a bit of a cough, and anything like that always upsets dear little Mummy; she

doesn't realize that he is made of steel springs just as I am. I'm sure she will try to come, if only for a minute, for Mrs. Parks asked her to receive with her. She didn't care to do that because, though we met the Parks very often in Paris, they were never more than acquaintances, not real friends; but to stay away might hurt her feelings, and of course that must not be."

"Oh, no, a Brooke of Virginia would never do that; she would be hospitable to a burglar, even while waiting for the police to come for him, and when he left, handcuffed, regret that uncontrollable circumstances prevented his spending the night!" said Lucy, mimicking the tone and manner of an old great-aunt of Brooke's so thoroughly that she was forced to laugh.

"But thou, O most transparent of all the Brookes, even if you have Scotch granite and American steel concealed in your depths, you very well know that Madame Parks would have given many shekels of gold to have had your mother standing on her right this afternoon. Do you realize that she even asked me to sing to-day? Of course I wouldn't."

"That surely was a compliment to your voice that you can hardly find fault with," said Brooke, pausing on the threshold to gather together the requisite number of cards.

"My voice! That had nothing whatever to do with it. My voice might be like a jay's with its crop full

of popcorn, for all she knows about it. No, it was all on account of daddy; this affair has been well thought out. She has been careful to have a representative bidden from every department of the society trust,—clergy, laity, art, music, science. Daddy represents up-to-date financiering,—there is no Mrs. Dean, hence me! She wandered a bit, though, in asking me to sing on the same afternoon with paid professionals. If it had been a very select and spirituelle affair, with Maud Knowles at the harp and Dick Fenton with his Boulevard imitations and songs, followed by bouquets of orchids concealing bijouterie for the performers, I might have yielded.

“Yes,” Lucy chattered on, “let us go upstairs; we had better drop our wraps, as we expect to make an afternoon of it. What an apartment! Madame’s, of course. Look at that bed on the dais and a boudoir and breakfast room beyond! Eight maids! Why didn’t she have four and twenty to match the pie black-birds? Look at the way in which their skirts stay in place behind when they wiggle them. Never saw such a thing off the stage; one straight line from belt to hem, just the stunning way Hilda Spong wears hers in ‘Lady Huntworth’s Experiment’! What is the exhibit in that room across the hall, with the walls draped with white over sky-blue? Everybody is going that way; let us also flock!

"As I live, it's the baby lying in state — no, holding a levée, I mean. What an odd-shaped cradle! Isn't he a fright, but look at his robe — Irish point all made in one piece — and his gold toilet things on that tray! Well, after all, there must be something novel to the Parkses about this. Papa has been married three times and mamma twice, and this Chinese Joss is all there is to show for it! I wonder if her craze for collecting bric-a-brac can possibly account for his looks? If there isn't the Senator himself, hovering around to show off his little son. I wonder if Madame knows papa is on the premises? Gracious, he's taking the baby out of the Easter egg! Hear the lace tear, and that monumental English head nurse doesn't move a muscle!

"Don't look distressed and blush so, Brooke; facts are facts, and then besides, nobody can hear me in this babel. Now, let's agree where we shall meet, for we shall be duly torn asunder directly we go downstairs. Come in here a second, my head feathers are awry. What a mercy it is to have hair like yours, that the more it is let alone, the better it behaves!

"No, don't touch the strings of your poke, and leave your bodice alone. That creamy lace simply looks confidential and clinging, and not a bit mussy like mine."

"I think I will go to the picture gallery as soon as we have made our bows to Mrs. Parks, and settle there," said Brooke, "so that I can see everything before the

concert is over. Then you will know where to find me. To-day I feel more like looking than listening," she added, when Lucy was silenced a moment by holding half a dozen jewelled stick pins between her lips, as she rearranged the folds of an expensive draped lace bodice that, in spite of the beauty of the fabric, seemed out of key and mussy, the severe and tailor-made being better adapted to her.

For a few moments the two lingered in one of the alcoves of the dressing room, looking for familiar faces among the arrivals.

"By the way, I suppose Mr. Fenton is coming in later with the other down-town men?" said Brooke. "If so, you needn't look me up at all."

"Dick may be coming, though I doubt it, but it will not be to meet me. See here, goosie," said Lucy, half avoiding her friend's eyes, "I might as well tell you now as any other time. Dick and I have agreed to disagree. It happened last Sunday, and I'd have told you before, only you take all such things so seriously."

"What is the matter; has he changed?"

"No, he has not, that is half the trouble. He has stayed quite too much the same; I only wonder that I could have endured it for the eight months it has lasted. You see, he was perfectly satisfied with himself as he was, and that leaves no room for improvement. Of course everybody knows, at the pace the world's rolling

along, if you don't go ahead, you slide back! I tend to balk and jump the traces enough myself when it comes to hills, Heaven knows, and if my mate in harness can't pull true on an up grade, where shall we be at? Dick kept along on the level good naturedly, I'll say that for him, yet it was because I was my father's daughter, not because I'm myself. Being a young broker, he thought it a good thing to have a father-in-law with unlimited 'pointers' in every wag of his chin (poor chap, he hasn't yet realized that these things mostly point both ways), and he was serenely content! As for me, I felt as if I should go wild, — no conversation except the eternal money market. I said so, — and more besides!

"He was very nice about it, — daddy really seemed relieved, — and — well, it's all over, though his mother did glower at me at first when I met her on the avenue yesterday, but she decided to bow."

"Oh, Lucy, why are you so impetuous? When you told me of the engagement, you said —"

"Now listen, Brooke Lawton, and hear me swear one thing: money in one's pocket is a blessing, but continually dinned into one's ears it's the other thing. If ever I marry any one, he must not be in this sickening money business; he must do something different, if it's only drawing pictures on the sidewalk with chalk held between his toes, like the armless sailor in Union

Square, though, come to think of it, I'd rather he'd have arms!

"By the way, why don't you 'phone your mother to come? It's going to be an awfully smart party. There's a 'phone in the writing room or somewhere near — there always is one now at swell functions for the use of guests, and a young man (not a woman — too dangerous) from central to work it; they say the society reporters fight and bribe to get the job, they hear so much 'inwardness.' Your mother needn't worry and stay at home. I don't think your father's sick. I heard daddy say last night that he is in another big deal, with trump cards enough to fill both hands, and he's holding them so close for fear of dropping any that he's bound to be preoccupied."

"It's time for us to go; I hear the music," said Brooke, who had been set thinking by her friend's talk.

"Why not come into the music room for a few numbers and then escape if you wish?" said Lucy, navigating the crowded stairs easily, and pausing on a landing to continue her chatter and glance into the room below. "What, all the chairs taken already? Just look at those orchids, by the dozen, not single, the whole plant hung by gilt chains from the ceiling!

"You won't come? Well, so be it, if you have the 'picture hunger' as badly as you did in Paris. Do you remember the big hybrid French-English-Dutchman

who gave that name to the moonstruck turns you used to have over painted 'masterpieces' and unpainted landscapes outdoors? Yes, I see you do. Well, I thought at one time he was painfully smitten and would probably lay himself down humbly at your feet, like an inconveniently thick bear rug that, failing to be able to step over, one must tread on, though often to one's downfall. Still, of course, with artists the meaning of their looks and actions are usually either exaggerated or vague, much like their talk of values and colour schemes and atmosphere. I heard this same Marte Lorenz in a group of ravers standing before a canvas one day at the Mirlitons' when I called for you, and I rubbered and peeped over their shoulders, expecting to see the portrait of a delicious woman at the very least; and what was the whole row about but an onion on a wooden plate, and they were saying that it was genuine and showed insight!

"It would be such fun to tease you, Brooke, if only you were teasable. Suppose, after all, there should be a real live man behind all this 'picture hunger.' I think that there must be from the way you have turned slack and dropped your brush in seeming disdain at your work, even after you won that Baumgarten prize, with the picture of your cousin Helen's Mellin's food babies sitting on the ground *au naturel*, eating cherries (pits and all), bless their poor fat tummies!

"However, there can't be a man concealed in your mind, you are too transparent, — I should have known it, and helped matters nicely to a focus for you. Yet the copy-books used to say 'still waters run deep'; who knows, innocent-looking mountain Brooke, but there is a great, deep, still swimming pool somewhere in your mind!

"Bless me, she is teasing after all!" ejaculated Lucy, for, while she was still gabbling, Brooke had left her, slipped through the portières, held apart by two footmen, given her name to a third, shaken her hostess cordially by the hand, and after carefully giving her mother's message of regret, melted away in the crowd.

"Charming girl, that Miss Lawton," was Mrs. Parks's mental comment. "I guess, after all, there is something in having a well-bred-to-the-bone mother. Three hundred people have squeezed my fingers already this afternoon and murmured all sorts of things, while they either gazed over my head or at my gown. She is the first one that looked at *me* and as if she meant what she said, or would really do me a good turn if she could." And the Senator's ambitious wife gazed after Brooke rather wistfully.

CHAPTER V

A PICTURE

ESCAPING from the ballroom, where, in spite of all possible care, the hothouse heat and heavy odour of flowers, together with the mild afternoon, made the air stifling, Brooke was guided by instinct toward the picture gallery. In the reception hall back of the stairs, concealed by a rose-covered screen, a Russian orchestra, the latest novelty, was playing; but as the first strains of the concert floated from the music room, the intended effect was lost and became wholly discordant and bewildering.

Once inside the doors, for the picture gallery was separated from the house itself not only by a short passageway, curtained at both ends, but by doors of richly carved antique oak, Brooke found herself in another world, in which two more of the liveried regiment and she herself were the only inhabitants. One of the men took from a Japanese stand of bronze, by which he was stationed, a long satin-covered book, that proved to be a catalogue of the paintings in the gallery. A photogravure of each one filled the left-hand page, a few words relating to the artist facing it.

Mind and body were at once refreshed. The air itself was pure and invigorating in the gallery, for the only floral decorations were conventionally trimmed bushes of box, European laurel in pots, and some pointed holly trees red with their Christmas offering of berries. Whatever there was of lavish overdisplay in the other parts of this new palace stopped outside of these doors. Ceiling and panelled wainscoting that ran below the picture line were of the same carved oak, the inlaid floor matching it in tone, while all else, wall hangings, divans, and rugs, were blended of soft greens, as harmonious and restful to the senses as the vines, ferns, and moss that drape and floor the forest. The lights adjusted above the paintings, with due regard to individual effect, were hidden from the eye by screens of coloured glass, in which design of flowers and leaf were so well mingled that they formed a part of the general whole.

As to the pictures themselves — not too many, all in a way masterpieces carefully hung — they seemed vistas opening through the greenery, carrying the vision at once into the scene or among the people represented. Only art could so feel for art, and the fact that the seeming simplicity was the result of much detailed thought and expense was nowhere apparent.

Brooke walked slowly to the upper end of the room, and seated herself in one of the recesses of an oddly

divided settee, high of back and arm, that gave to each occupant complete seclusion. For a few minutes she leaned back against the soft velvet, letting the quiet atmosphere envelop her, and then raised her eyes to the two pictures that chanced to face her, peering at them in her seclusion, from under her wide hat, with a sidewise expression of eyes and lips slightly parted that reminded one of Mme. le Brun's portrait of the charming Mme. Crussal.

The nearer picture was a marine, in which the Irish coast and waters of the Channel were revealed by light of the full moon, and between the headland and the foreground the white gulls were bedding themselves so closely that they made a second moon path on the water. Back flew Brooke's thoughts across the sea, — England and Holland held her for a moment, then she slipped on to France, to Paris, where for a year she had worked in Ridgeway's studio in the Rue Malesherbes and out at Passy, had been oftentimes elated and finally cast down. How a past mood can dominate the present as well as all surroundings! The next painting was of a stretch of low country threaded by a canal, cattle in the distance, and shivering poplars bending to the wind that scudded across the sky in threatening clouds, while in the foreground a flock of geese were looking about and pluming themselves against the coming storm.

Where had that scene passed before her? "The

Coming Storm near The Hague — E. Oliver (Salon, 1900)," said the catalogue.

"Ah!" Brooke exclaimed, half aloud. She remembered her first visit to the Salon, of standing before this same picture with Marte Lorenz, "the big hybrid English-Dutch-French artist," Lucy Dean called him, and laughing at the solemn, stupid geese, while he had told her in his perfect, slow English that he had often driven flocks of geese to pasture in his boyhood, also that sometimes he had found them to be no laughing matter,—a trifling incident at the time, but now a sort of landmark in the receding journey.

She had met this Lorenz (Marte his intimates called him) often that winter and spring on the easy impersonal footing that prevails between the well-bred American woman and the art students of all countries. He had been presented to her mother most regularly at a fête in Ridgeway's garden the autumn of their arrival, and from that moment until their parting, a year later, one thing had set him apart from all the score of men with whom she had come in close contact, men who blindly flattered, evaded, or temporized. He had always told her the truth about her work. If she had not realized it at the time, the conviction had always come to her sooner or later.

As to Lorenz himself, once a pupil of the Beaux Arts, his nationality prevented his striving for the Prix-

de-Rome, and he had turned his work toward less classic lines; landscapes were his forte, the figure coming second, and yet he oftenest worked at figure-painting and conventional portraiture also, for he must have money for the pot-boiling, much as he disliked the necessity.

Farther away slipt the Whirlpool city and its surroundings. Once more was Brooke sketching in oils, with some friends who often went to the Carlo Rossi garden to pose for each other. Her subject was a girl of the Boulevards, nominally a flower seller. Successful in the drawing and colour, try as she might Brooke could not give the touch that should bring the lifelike expression to the face. With knit brows she looked up to see whose was the shadow cast on the grass before her. It was Lorenz, big, honest fellow, his hands clasped upon the back of the garden seat, his thatch of dark hair sticking out over his deep-set blue eyes, while a questioning expression involved in its uncertainty his straight nose, his deeply cleft chin, and the sensitive yet strong mouth that separated them. Even his short-cut mustache, which accentuated rather than concealed his lips, expressed doubt.

"What is it, M. Lorenz?" Brooke had asked, smiling at his serious air; "no one ever tells me anything definite but you. The master says, 'Good! keep on!' One friend only grunts; some one else says '*Pas mal.*'"

I know that I must work, work, work, but what do I most lack?"

Lowering his eyes almost to the grass itself, he spoke rapidly, as if the telling was a pain to him: "You have not yet had the awakening; for it you must wait; it is the same with me, but I may not dry my brushes to wait for the day, only work, and destroy, and work again, come good, come ill. It is not enough to block the form and lay on the colours truly. Unless you can interpret your vision and see its shadow on the canvas, watch it draw breath, move, and speak to you, you can never create. But first of all you must know and feel, even if you suffer. How can you interpret this woman before you? Never could you paint for what she stands. Try children, animals, anything else — or better, dry your brush and wait!"

Brooke had flushed angrily and answered curtly; even now the memory brought colour to her cheeks. Only once again had she seen Lorenz before leaving, and now two years had passed. What had become of him? There were depths in this woman's nature that her parents, all devotion in their different ways, had never fathomed, of which her friends of every day had never dreamed; and in one of these secret places, all unconscious to herself, this man had gained sufficient place at least to bar all others.

While she was thus dreaming away the afternoon, the

concert being ended, the throng pressed toward the gallery, and the confusion of voices, high in key and surging on, brought Brooke quickly to herself. Rising, she turned over the pages of the catalogue, reading the artists' names, and sauntered down the line to where the numbers began, nodding occasionally, or saying a few words to friends that came up; some of whom were stopping to see the pictures, others merely noting the scenic effect of the whole. Suddenly she halted so abruptly, her fingers gripping the page between them with noticeable tension, that a man behind nearly fell over her, while her eyes fastened on the letters that said, "24: Eucharistia. M. Lorenz. 1901." Before she could read the details opposite, the man whom she had stopped, Charlie Ashton (now Carolus, cousin to Lucy Dean and a courtesy artist possessed of a popular studio for concerts) looked over her shoulder and said: —

"Ah, Miss Lawton, looking for the picture the Senator's gone daft about, because he thinks the woman in it looks like his wife when he first saw her as a girl out in the California wine country? It's over this way, that one with the long palm over the frame. I've just come from there; everybody's crowding round, guessing what the name means. I suggested making up a guessing pool on it at five a head, and letting the winner choose the charity; the Bishop is having a shy at it now."

Brooke steadied herself, and crossing the room joined

the group, catching at first but a partial glimpse of the picture.

"Step back here by this holly tree; this distance is needed to preserve the atmosphere," said Ashton, guiding her by the sleeve into an alcove formed of holly and laurel bushes arranged to shelter an exquisite ivory statuette of Diana, the crescent, fillet, and bow being of rich gold.

"I have never before seen pictures so well hung," said Brooke, glancing about as they waited for the crowd to move on, as it soon inevitably would, toward the banquet hall.

"A well-placed remark, Miss Brooke, sent straight home," gurgled Ashton, plucking at his collar, which was too tight for his short neck. "I may say that I virtually hung these pictures, for I sent the Senator the man who did, you know. Before I forget it, the Bagby girls and the rest asked me to see you about arranging a benefit concert for that pretty little Julia Garth, — used to give such stunning musicales a year ago, — now old Garth is dead, and they've gone to no-put-together smash! Yes, not a cent! I've offered my studio for it, and they thought perhaps you'd give a picture to raffle, — just any little thing you've thrown off in a hurry will do."

His words passed almost unheard, for while he was speaking the crowd parted and the entire painting became

visible. Brooke, leaning forward, at first flushed, then grew white to the lips. The scene set before her was a bit in the depths of the park at Fontainebleau. A grassy path melted away in the distance between great sombre oaks that strengthened as they reached the foreground. At the foot of one of these sat a man, an artist, who had been sketching, for his implements lay on the sward before him. His whole position was of dejection, except the head, which was raised in a startled attitude. A little behind him stood a young woman, clad in the dainty summer dress of every day, ash-brown hair loosely caught up beneath a simple hat, paint box and luncheon basket slung from her shoulder. One hand rested on the gnarled oak trunk, the other, reaching across his shoulder, dropped into the man's idle, listless hands a bunch of golden grapes, that in their ripeness carried sunlight with them. Graceful and charming as was the composition, it was the handling of the light wherein the magic lay. Sifting down between the leaves, the glow of early afternoon hovered about the girl's bent head like a halo, and passing behind, fell upon the man's upturned face, transfiguring it with a sort of holy joy, then focussed and was swallowed in the bunch of grapes.

A voice seemed calling in Brooke's ears: "The last afternoon, when you all went sketching with the master, and after lunching in the woods you overtook the brotherhood of Clichy (as Lorenz's coterie was called).

Farther on and apart you found him alone, with head bent. You thought he was asleep and dropped the cool grapes in his hands, half as a trick, darting away again. Then good Madame Druz, the chaperon of the day, coming up, scolded you for 'American imprudence,' and finally that night you cried, half at her vulgar interpretation of a harmless act, and half because Lorenz never gave word or sign before your leaving. And because not a single flower of the mass that filled your railway carriage was from him, you let Lucy amuse herself all the way to Cherbourg by pelting officials with them at each station passed. He has painted you as you were!" cried the voice; "his face is as he might wish it to be."

It required an effort on Brooke's part not to cry out, "Hush! speak lower!" so real did the words seem.

"Good work, isn't it?—though half a dozen of us here at home could do as well, if we had the atmosphere, you know," said Ashton's voice, sounding through the rush of waters that filled her ears. "The Senator boasts that he was the first to recognize the artist whom every one now applauds, and he paid a cool ten thousand for it, the man's first important picture at that! The old man saw it in the new Salon, but it wasn't for sale. 'No, no, no,' said the artist,—'he had a superstition, a sentiment, a desire to keep it,'—but the Senator thought 'Yes, yes, yes, the desire will decrease with time and—"

money,' and so it did, for this fall, just as the Parkses were on the verge of leaving, the Senator doubled the first offer and Lorenz capitulated. Then, before the 'brotherhood' could borrow his 'luck penny' he disappeared somewhere in Normandy, they say, to study, out of the depressing sound of the pot-boiling of the Quarter. Half his friends were glad, Ridgeway wrote me, and the other half, being jealous, shrugged their shoulders and raised their eyes, groaning, 'Another mad American!'

"I have it all down fine, you see, for the papers tomorrow, — great scheme! I had a Harvard chum that was, Tom Brownell, who won't go the respectable pace his father set for him in finance, and has turned reporter, work it up. He wants news, and, plague it, it must be *true* or he won't touch it. Of course I don't appear in it, but all the credit is socially mine, you see.

"Why, come to think of it, Miss Brooke, I believe the girl looks a bit like you! Did you ever chance to see this man? But then, of course, so many charming women look alike in those stunning shirt-waist things, you know. What do you make of the name?"

Brooke wished that he might babble on as long as possible, that she might learn the painting by heart and try to fathom the peculiarity of the shaft of light, but as he stopped she said, almost without thought, "Eucharistia! why may it not be the girl's name?"

"By Jove! of course, we never thought of it!" said

Ashton. "You're growing quite pale from standing so long. You must have some punch. Do let me take you to the banquet hall; it's jolly nice there — all small tables and souvenir menus in silver frames. I planned them, too, though Tiffany's name *is* on them. There's Cousin Lucy, and the Bagby girls are waving to you now." ("Yes, we're under way, hold a table," he signalled.) "We can cook up the concert while we feed," and offering his arm, upon which Brooke laid her hand gratefully, for she felt a sudden weariness, he led her through the maze of skirts and furniture as skilfully and rapidly as if he had been her partner in the cotillon, and seated her at one of the little tables amid a bevy of her friends, who were discussing the house, the hostess, the flowers, the menus, and the fallen fortunes of poor Julia Garth in a most impartial way, and at the top of their voices.

"Of course it's awful to suddenly drop from having your gowns from Paris, a maid, a private turnout, and keeping open house — or rather houses — and all that, to a flat somewhere in Brooklyn, with a sick mother, and trying to work off your music for a living," said one shrill voice; "but then it is an awful bore, too, for us to have her on our minds. This concert is only the beginning, I suppose."

"Julia plays delightfully, and we all have more or less chamber music during the winter, and one of us

might take her to Lenox or Newport this summer," said another, in a reproving tone; "and then among us all there are plenty of children for her to teach."

"If she plays and sings for us all winter, that is sufficient reason why we shall be sick of her next summer," said the first voice. "You know how it was with Mrs. Darcey Binks and her Creole songs. We thought we could not get enough of her. She thought she was settled here for life, and biff! the Spanish mandolin players knocked her out the second season. As for lessons, if you take up some one half out of charity, and then go South in the middle of a term, they will always whine about it, and you feel mean; a professional can take care of herself and always gets even, but doesn't let you know it."

"I wish we could think of something newer than a concert, that would make a hit and a pot of money," said Lucy Dean, not bragging of the fact that she had already asked Julia Garth to come and live with her, and been refused kindly but firmly. "What can you suggest, Brooke? you are always overflowing with ideas, even if some of them are too good for this world."

Brooke, thus challenged, half rose in her chair so that she faced both tables, and said: "I do not believe in offering Julia what she would accept as work and you consider as charity; it is false pretence on both sides! We can easily make up a Christmas purse for her among

ourselves, without giving her the pain of the advertising of a benefit concert, and all the talk of it. Then when she has a chance to know where she stands, — her father only died a month ago, poor child, — I will get my father or yours" (motioning to Lucy) "to give her *real* work for *real* pay, and with no charitable tag hanging to it. She has kept household accounts and sometimes been her father's private secretary. I saw her last week, and what she wants and is able to do is real work and plenty of it to make her forget, not charity coddling to make her remember."

"Mercy on me! don't cut us up like cheese sandwiches, with your sarcasm!" ejaculated Lucy, "and clutch that chair so, as if you had claws. Your eyes remind me of a hawk that perches in a cage over in the park opposite my window, and glares all day long at the silly sparrows outside!"

Brooke laughed, and the dangerous flash in her eyes dying out again, she turned to her plate of salad and the general gossip of the day, but a red spot still glowed in the middle of each cheek. A few minutes later she might have been seen driving down the avenue in her mother's brougham, trying to decipher, by the light of the electric street lamps, some printing in the silk-covered catalogue.

This is what she read: "Marte Lorenz, born at his uncle's tulip farm near Haarlem, in 1872. Educated

in England, where his father had been a merchant. Studied at the Amsterdam Art School, going afterward to Paris, where his countryman, Israels, befriended him. A hard student, but the picture 'Eucharistia' is his first important work, while European critics and his masters believe it is the beginning of a great career. At present he is living in seclusion in Normandy, following his art."

Ashton, the useful, had patched up the biographies in the little book, helter-skelter, but Brooke did not know it, and tucking the catalogue carefully into her great muff, she leaned back and closed her eyes.

It was her portrait that Lorenz had painted, together with his own, whatever the mystic word "Eucharistia" might mean. He had not forgotten her, then, and he was loath to part with the picture. She did not formulate the pleasure the thought gave her, — it was enough in itself.

Then the brougham stopped before the blazing lights of the St. Hilaire, where the Lawtons were making a temporary home, a sort of bridge, that both mother and daughter had long wearied of, between the simpler past and the long-delayed, complex future, when in the new house, now building, her father promised once and for all to drop the reins of tape and wire, cease from hurrying, and take rest.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAWTONS

WITH Mrs. Lawton the afternoon of the Park musical had been a time of irresolution. When the man of a family is noted for swift arbitrary decisions and often unexplained action in all domestic affairs, in important matters and petty details alike, his wife is apt, simply by force of reaction, to be driven to the opposite extreme in those things that concern herself alone. Not that Adam Lawton's wife had ever been lacking in spirit, and when, as Pamela Brooke, a girl of twenty, he had taken her from her southern plantation home, then crippled and impoverished by war, yet where she still held absolute sway, many nodded their heads, and said that the calculating, keen-eyed Yankee would some day be startled by the fire of southern blood.

Not but what his coming, seeing, and conquering had been as swift as the most romantic could desire, one short month compassing it all, for there was a certain magnetism about Adam Lawton that, when he chose to exert it, was irresistible, while to those

outside its influence he was doubly a bit of chilling steel.

Nor had his wife ever faltered in her loyalty to him; she would have given much more than he would take, for in the beginning hers had been a nature that sought happiness in pouring out her love freely and enveloping its object in it, at the same time giving the man she had chosen, through imagination, every noble and winning attribute that would increase her passion.

Two sons had been born to her before she had awakened from this ecstatic period and was perforce obliged to separate the real from the ideal. Not that Adam Lawton loved her a degree less strongly than when, calling upon her father on purely business matters, he had first seen her riding up the unkempt avenue of her home, her beauty and bearing lending distinction to the faded habit that she wore. His love was of a strange quality, a sort of transmutation of metals by sudden fire that, having once taken place, must of necessity be welded for all time. In reality an egotist, from his own point of view he was wholly unselfish, for he asked little for what he gave, and would allow none of the little daily services that nourish love, whose best food must have the flavour of mutual dependence.

The two boys died of scarlet fever almost together, before they were well out of babyhood, and after a

lapse of many years a daughter, Brooke, had come, then another lapse, and another son, called Adam, now about sixteen; and like many a son of a father who has planned a boy's career to the minutest detail, he seemed not only bound not to go in the desired way, but to lack the bump of direction, which turns a boy from being merely driftwood and guides him in any sort of way whatsoever.

From habitual restraint of emotions learned in those first ten years, Mrs. Lawton had come to pass for a perfectly bred, though somewhat unsympathetic, woman.

Brooke, whose own heart naturally beat as tumultuously as ever did her mother's, had learned to feel something of this even in her early childhood, when at her father's footstep she had been hushed in some wild exhibition of childish enthusiasm; and though she and her mother were the very best of friends, there was a certain quality missing in their intercourse. Perhaps missing is not the word, — a quality not yet developed expresses it more exactly, and this, too, came through the peculiar temperament of Adam Lawton himself. Outside of his business he had but one thought, his family, and to supply their needs as he read them, his selfishness lying in the fact that he asked so little of them, beyond their presence in his house, that it was impossible for him to judge, by

intimate contact, what those needs really were, or to realize that confidence and sympathy are better coin than dollars.

Brooke alone had been able to break through this crust of self-sufficiency that he had used as a barrier against the world in his early days of struggle, until it now shut him off from the luxury of everything natural, uncalculated, and spontaneous. Brooke had enough of the enthusiasm of youth not to be chilled by it. She looked forward hopefully to the promised time when he should take a long holiday, and be with them, and, as she explained it, only "think foolishness." He had never refused her anything that she asked of him, not that her wishes had ever been extravagant. Many a time, as some clever whim of hers brought a rare smile to his keen, thin face, intelligent and alive, if somewhat harshly lined and worn, he almost clinched the hand that he always kept in his left pocket in despair that this child was not the boy who should keep his name alive, instead of that other who now bore it. But in the fact that Brooke was a daughter lay all the charm, for there is no other born relationship so subtle, so potent of good for each, as that between father and daughter.

For many years the Lawtons lived in an ample old-fashioned house in one of the streets converging at Washington Square, where Brooke and young Adam

had been born. Here Mrs. Lawton had passed many days of quiet content and social comfort, entertaining in the open-hearted southern way that does not admit of push or hurry. True, the neighbourhood was changing, and others more ambitious were moving away; in fact, Adam Lawton had one day said the time had come when he was ready to build a modern house, in a part of the city where a home more suited to his position and a good investment could be combined, for with him the two propositions always went together.

Mrs. Lawton had sighed, but said nothing. She loved the wide, sunny house, with its colonial mantels and irregular staircase, and secretly she hoped that no one would buy it. Faint hope, for in a week from the day the matter was broached, Adam Lawton announced that the house was sold. A business building had purchased the adjoining property and virtually gave him his price. They could live in an apartment hotel pending the building of the new house. It would give his wife a rest, for he was beginning to notice that she was looking rather worn, and did not attribute it to the real cause or the flight of years, but to some extraneous reason that that most dubious of all acts, "a change," might overcome. So Mrs. Lawton was spending her second winter at the St. Hilaire, living apart from her own life, as it were. True, she had been listless and not very well of late, but it was

more from inertia than any constitutional weakness. No one could expect to keep for thirty years the radiant type of blonde beauty with which Pamela Brooke had glowed at twenty. Mrs. Lawton was still in a sense a beautiful woman, but the vivacity that often outlives freshness of tint and distinctiveness of feature had died first of all. Her charm lay in a certain refinement of outline; colour and features had grown dim as the reflection of a face in a mirror blurred by dust, and her mass of waving golden brown hair, that in its lights and shades had once surpassed even Brooke's, was of a clear white, as of the days of powder, and gave the delicate features an almost dramatic setting.

As Adam Lawton grew more and more absorbed in finance, he was the more exacting of her presence during the evening hours, when, too absorbed to either go out or bid friends come to him, he sat in his simply furnished den, for all luxury stopped at his door, and pored over papers, letters, and maps, scarcely glancing up or speaking to his wife twice in the evening, yet expecting her presence and conscious if she left him for a moment.

* * * * *

When Brooke had started on this particular winter afternoon for the Parks's musicale, in company with her friend, Lucy Dean, Mrs. Lawton had quite decided

not to go. Her husband had been unusually silent for the few days past, and had said something about possibly coming home in time to drive up to the new house, which was yet uncompleted, owing to the building strike of the past summer.

But as the early twilight came on and he did not appear, she grew restless, and knowing that it was too late for the proposed drive, quickly determined to go to the Parkses' for a little while and return with Brooke. Going to her lounging room to call the carriage by telephone, for she had an entirely separate wire from the private service at her husband's desk, she found several letters lying upon the table. Exclaiming at the carelessness of the maids, of whom two were kept for service of meals, etc., in the apartment, she looked at the addresses, and the handwriting on the last put the thought of going out from her mind.

Four were in the handwriting of private secretaries, and promised social invitations; the fifth, addressed in the shaded pin-point writing of the seminary of thirty years ago, was postmarked Gilead; while the sixth was in the rough and painfully unformed hand of Adam, "the Cub," as his friends called him, her only living son, now at a military school some sixty miles away.

It was impossible to deny that the Cub was behind-hand in his work, and that, instead of being within two

years of college, according to his father's schedule, he was little more than in sight of it; but her mother's heart told her that the rigidity of his father's methods was quite as much to blame as her son's stupidity. Coming of ancestors whose training on both sides had been for and of the out-of-door life, the forcing system of surveillance under which he had lived, summer and winter alike, since his eleventh year, had developed only the evil in him.

Vainly she had suggested, nay almost fought, to have him sent to a famous ranch school, where the sons of several of her friends had learned self-reliance and books at one and the same time. Adam Lawton would not hear of it, saying the dangers of the life and the distance were too great.

In Brooke his measure of fatherly affection was complete and satisfied, and that she should never put her hand in an empty pocket his chief desire; but still all his hopes of the future of his race theoretically centred in this only son, as in an asset of both flesh and money, and every hair of his tawny head and freckle on his face was more precious than his own life-blood; yet he had the narrowness of the self-made man, the financier in particular, and he could see honour and success in one path only — that in which he himself had trodden.

Adam Lawton senior, now halfway between sixty

and seventy, though he did not allow it even to himself, often felt the lack of academic knowledge, and therefore Adam junior must undergo a certain polishing system perforce, even if the substance to be polished lost its identity and crumbled to chalk in the process. For only two things had Adam evinced any liking, — for out-of-door life and a horse, while his backwardness with his lessons had cut off these outlets by keeping him at school or under tutelage the entire season through.

If Adam Lawton loved his son as a matter of heredity, Pamela Lawton loved him as a human being, as her baby, and her maternal passion gained fierceness by repression. The letter was an appeal for permission to go home, and contained a doctor's certificate saying that the boy had, in his opinion, outgrown his strength, and needed several months of outdoor life, etc., etc. Mrs. Lawton crushed the paper in her hand. The last time such a missive had been received it had resulted in the Cub's being sent to travel with a tutor. One human being the boy did love, and that was herself, — he must have her care now or never!

Without realizing that the hotel was no place for the boy, or what the result might be, she went to her desk, wrote a few emphatic words, enclosed a ten-dollar bill in the envelope (it chanced to be the last money in her purse), and, quickly putting on coat and bonnet, took

it herself to the post-box on the street corner, not trusting it to the hotel box; then she returned to her room with flushed cheeks, feeling as guilty as a girl slipping out with a love-letter instead of a mother daring to tell her own son to come home. At that moment she fairly hated the motiveless comfort by which she was surrounded; passivity had become almost a disease, she must shake it off; she would speak that night, and have an understanding about the Cub, no matter how busy her husband might be.

When she had laid aside her things, no maid yet appearing, the Gilead letter claimed her attention, and she was soon absorbed in it. It told of Keith's resolution to go to Boston, and gave an inventory of the property on the farm that had been bought with Adam Lawton's money.

She had also, she said, written for instructions as to its future care; would he take charge, or should she look for some suitable person in the neighbourhood? Receiving no answer, and judging that the letter had either been lost, or else that her cousin had been too busy to consider it, Miss Keith had made a second careful copy and enclosed it in a letter to Mrs. Lawton, saying that time pressed, and she must rely upon her to "jog" Cousin Adam's memory, or perhaps, as the farm at least stood in Brooke's name, that she might have some wishes in the matter.

Mrs. Lawton had almost finished reading the inventory of simple furnishings, etc., when Brooke entered. Her mother at once noticed a strange expression in her always candid features, and a new light in her wide-open eyes; but the letters in her lap caught Brooke's attention, and after she had given a brief history of the doings of the afternoon, the two women, seated side by side, bent their heads over the Cub's epistle, though the elder already knew it by heart, word for word.

"The poor, poor Cub!" ejaculated Brooke at last, half laughing, and then stopping short, for looking up, she saw tears trembling on her mother's lashes. "If it were only long ago, we would buy him a horse, and spear, and shield, and smuggle him outside the castle walls at night, and let him gallop away to seek his own fortunes. Do you know, little mother, that, in spite of all the liberty I have, and money in my pocket without the asking, I sometimes feel choked and tied down like this bad boy of ours? It was only an hour ago, when I was sitting in that beautiful picture gallery, that it came over me how so many of the things we do every day seem unreal and like a useless dream. We ourselves arrange or else blindly submit to customs that keep us apart instead of bringing those who love each other together, until life gets to be like those stupid gas fire-logs yonder, all for

show — a little feverish heat and unwholesomeness as a result instead of the true thing, though to be sure real logs are more trouble and a greater responsibility to tend.

“I want to be something more than furniture in our new home, if it is ever finished, and we succeed in getting out of what Lucy Dean calls this ‘elaborated parlour-car method of living.’ Yes, mother, I’m getting what you call a restless streak again. I think I’m going to pick up my brushes” — and then a serious, almost sad expression crossed her face as she added, “if they will let me.”

“So Cousin Keith’s going away, — going to be married! I wish she could have done the second without the first. I like to think of her at the farm just as she used to be. You know it’s my farm now, and I’ve always planned to go back there some summer, and really work, for if anything could put life in my brush, it would be to live in my ‘River Kingdom.’ I’d much rather do that than have a large country place, such as father plans, though of course Gilead is too quiet and out of touch with things for him, and the farm is too small a bit for his energy to work upon. Cousin Keith has been very thrifty, — ‘five cows, a farm horse, chickens, ducks, seed potatoes, cordwood, etc.,’ (all mine, too, because the deed says ‘inclusive of all live stock, and furnishings’). Last of all she lists

‘Tatters, the family dog, whose race has been on the soil as long as we ourselves; if he can’t transfer himself to the newcomers not of the name, Dr. Russell has promised to take him down to Oaklands. Please understand, Cousin Pamela, that Tatters doesn’t rank with live stock, — he is a person, and must be treated as such!’”

“Tatters!” repeated Brooke, looking involuntarily at the artificial fire, so surely does visible heat draw the outward eye when the mind’s eye is a-roving. “That was the name of one of the dogs they had that autumn when I spent that lovely month there, and played at gypsy every day. But he must be very, very old now. Yes, you shall be well treated, old fellow, and not ‘transferred’ to anything or anybody against your will.

“Mother, do you know I think that if only Cousin Keith were not going away, it would be a fine thing to send the Cub to Gilead for a while, until he pulled himself together, and then some not overzealous tutor with a fondness for walking might be found for him.

“What is it?” asked Brooke, reading the confusion in her mother’s face. “You have answered him already and told him that he may come? Good! now we will act together. You take father quite too seriously; if he really understood just what we both

wish to do and be, I'm sure that he would be the last one to hinder either, but we haven't let him see. How can a man who has lived his own life so long possibly understand women unless they give him the clew, and whisper 'hot' and 'cold' when he gets off the track?

"No one, since ever I can remember, has been allowed to let father even think that he can make a mistake; consequently he really believes he cannot err, and I don't think that he is wholly to blame for it. I'm going to beg for the Cub's liberty the minute father comes home, and more than that, I'm going to tell him that we four have been groping round in opposite directions, and that he simply must come into our lives, and let us do for him, or take us into his — that the 'some day' when he will have time to listen must begin this very night!"

"Dinner is served!" said the reproving accents of the waiting-maid, letting drop the portière as she spoke, and both women glanced in surprise at the clock that was striking eight.

"Eight o'clock already, and I'm in my street gown," said Brooke, gathering up her possessions, and making sure that the silk-bound catalogue was in her muff.

"Eight o'clock, and your father has not yet come home!"

"Perhaps he has stopped at the club, and talked longer than usual. I heard to-day through Lucy,

to whom her father seems to speak as freely about his business as if she were his partner, that our parents are engaged in some important 'deal' together!

"He is probably late for our special benefit," said Brooke, cheerfully, "so that we may make ourselves just a wee bit pretty," and putting her arm about her mother, she led her down the corridor to their rooms, which adjoined, and five minutes sufficed for each to slip on the tasteful, yet simple, dinner gown that the lady's-maid, now at her post, had laid in readiness.

"Ask the page in the outer hall if any note has come for mother," said Brooke to the woman, as they went to the dining room. "It was only yesterday that I found that two personal notes had been travelling up and down in the elevator for half the morning, in spite of two men at the door, and one posted every ten feet the rest of the way."

"There is no note come, ma'am," replied the waiting-maid, a couple of minutes later, "but he says that Mr. Lawton's been over an hour at home, — at least he came in then, and he's not seen him go out, that is, not by the lift. He must have let himself in with a key, then, for neither Sellers nor I opened for him."

"Perhaps he went to the den, thinking we were all out, and does not realize how late it is," said Brooke, moving swiftly down the hall, followed by her mother. Turning the corner, for her father had located his den,

for the sake of quiet, as far as possible from the rest of the apartment, she saw the light that shone above and below the portière, for the door was not wholly closed.

"Yes, he is here after all!" and she threw open the door without knocking, as she alone dared, and entered with some playful words upon her lips, quite prepared to rumple the iron-gray hair, a little thin on top, that partially capped the figure seated at his desk, with his left hand, as usual, in his pocket.

The next moment she stopped, as an undefined feeling of dread held her fast, — the right hand was stiffly extended, as if it had just let go its hold of the movable 'phone that stood on the desk, and knocked it over. The usually alert figure had settled in the chair, the head dropping backward, while, after a single breath, that resounded like a snore, there was no sound.

Brooke touched him quickly; there was still the warmth of life, and the left side of the face twitched frightfully, but no words came; his face, flushed at first, was growing rapidly livid. Instantly she wound her strong young arms about him, and, laying him on the thick rug, his head slightly turned and raised, she motioned to her mother and the maid, who had come at her unconscious call, to loosen collar and clothing, while she sped back to the telephone in her mother's sitting room to call a doctor who was resident

in the hotel, and he was at hand almost before she realized that the call had gone forth.

"Cerebral hemorrhage; has he had bad news or some sudden shock?" was what the physician said a moment after he entered the room where Adam Lawton lay, and saw the litter of papers and the overthrown instrument. But there was no letter or telegram among them that could indicate, and the ominous telephone receiver was mute.

As the men from the house helped move him to his room, Mrs. Lawton and Brooke following silent with the first calmness of a shock, her own words rang in her ears. "He must come into our lives and let us do for him or take us into his life; the 'some day' when he will have time to listen must begin to-night!"

The first hour passed, that period of rapid action following a calamity that intervenes before the clutch of the tension of continued strain is felt.

The family physician came and called an expert in counsel, and then Brooke was directed to send for a nurse, — more than one her mother would not have, and as she was intelligently calm, no objection was made to her insistence that she should share both the care and responsibility of the night.

Adam Lawton was unconscious, and life itself must hang in the balance for many hours at best, and the physicians insisted upon the most perfect quiet.

Who can say where the mind is when its physical registry is interrupted? The physician cannot tell you, but at the same time he is very careful to keep injurious impression beyond the range of the seemingly deaf ears. Brooke went to her father's den and touched the instrument that had so recently fallen from his hand, almost with a shudder. If only it would repeat to her what it had said to him, some light would be shed upon the mystery.

After arranging for the nurse, a desire for companionship during this night of suspense seized her, and she called the number that meant Lucy Dean, thinking as she did so, "I must tell her as quickly as I can, for I cannot bear her usual telephone joking now."

"Lucy? It is I, Brooke Lawton; can you come down and spend the night with me? Please listen until I finish. Something awful has happened — father —"

Lucy (breaking in with a torrent of words): "Yes, you poor dear, I know all about it; heard it just as soon as I got home, before dinner — dad told me. We would have been down by now, only dad thought, as your father had gone against his advice through all this matter, it might seem pushing in me. Cheer up, it may come out all right yet."

Brooke: "I don't understand; how could you have heard before dinner? — it was eight o'clock before we knew ourselves."

"Dad was worried over the affair and had a special sent him after he came up town."

"Lucy, what are you talking about?"

"Why, what else but your father's great deal to buy up the stock control of the T. Y. D. Q. Railroad, and the way those rascally friends of his turned traitor? It isn't so killing, after all. Dad was down perfectly flat twelve years ago, and now he's ten times to the good. What dad thought foolish was for him to realize on everything else he had to go into this shaky deal!"

"You mean that my father has failed! Then that accounts, oh, that accounts for it all!"

"You don't say that you did not know it? What did you mean and what are you talking about? Your father hasn't —" Fortunately the question that Lucy asked did not reach Brooke's ears, for, pushing the instrument from her across the desk, she neither cried nor raved nor wrung her hands, but sitting forward in her father's chair, very much the attitude he took when deep in thought, scarcely stirred for the quarter-hour. The visible signs of the years she lacked of being the age she really was came swiftly, and laid their hands upon hers, not empty hands nor yet filled with the trifles the years sometimes hold. Presently Courage entered her heart, and then its sponsors, Hope and Constancy.

Soon a muffled closing of the door at the lower

end of the hall, and the approaching tiptoe tread of two people of uneven weights, brought her to her feet and into the crisis again. It was Lucy, who, with every vestige of flippancy gone, threw her arms around her friend's neck and burst into tears, while Brooke held out her hand to Mr. Dean, meanwhile, looking him straight in the eyes, saying: "Thank you for coming. Do not trouble to conceal anything, only tell me the truth, and do it quickly," not realizing that in such cases truth-telling is not the simple thing that it is reckoned.

CHAPTER VII

THE DAY AFTER

THERE was a single day of incredulity and suspense, and then the fact of Adam Lawton's financial downfall was made public through the papers, together with the names of those who had been swept from their feet in his company. As to his physical collapse, it was merely stated that he was ill at his department in the St. Hilaire, denied himself to all visitors, and would hold no communication even with his lawyer or business associates.

Few people sink alone in a financial maelstrom, and Lawton was not one of these; so that the cries and muttered imprecations of those who, unlike her father, were conscious and battling for life in trying to find and cling to bits of the wreckage reached Brooke and rang in her ears, partially deafening her to her own thoughts.

It was not until noon of the second day that she had succeeded in getting her mother to leave her post and see Mr. Dean in the library. At first Brooke had hoped to keep the knowledge of the real cause of her father's illness from her mother, for a few days at least, but it

was of no use; every one in the great hotel was aware of the facts, even though it made no difference in the attitude of the employees, for with a certain class of people, and a fairly intelligent one at that, failures are often interpreted merely as an odd trick in the game of finance now played. One of the important morning papers even went so far as to print a thinly veiled hint that Adam Lawton's seclusion and supposed illness was a very subtle excuse for gaining time or allowing him to forget much that it would be extremely inconvenient to be called upon to remember at this juncture.

Mrs. Lawton had gone through her ordeal with Mr. Dean very quietly; she heard his explanation — that is, as far as anything that might be said could be called such, but its full meaning had not yet dawned upon her; and being utterly worn out she allowed herself to be tucked up on the lounge in Brooke's room, where she fell into an exhausted sleep, under the soothing touch of her daughter's fingers.

Lucy Dean, coming in during the late afternoon, for she had remained with her friend since the first and had only gone out for a walk, found Brooke sitting bolt upright in her father's chair in the den, a newspaper that rested on the desk crumpled in one hand, and a dangerous light in her eyes.

"Have you seen this?" she asked Lucy, in a voice that was fairly hoarse from suppression, as she pointed

to the insinuating article which bore the double significance of being semi-editorial in form,—“and appearing in the *Daily Forum* too, the paper that father always thought the most sound and moderate. Oh, how I wish that I could get hold of some one and make them believe at least that father is truly ill and knows absolutely no one, not even mother and me!”

“Brooke Lawton, if you are going to read all the papers say or hint about your affairs during the next few weeks, you will give me a chance to look up a sanatorium, with nice cool bars for you to snub your nose against, which won't improve its shape. Don't read the papers; if the things aren't true, why bother, and if some of them are, what are you going to do about it?”

Lucy had been astonishingly quiet and sympathetic for nearly twenty-four hours, but a long walk in the fresh air had raised her indomitable animal spirits to the top again, and though they sometimes made Brooke catch her breath and gasp, like too crude a stimulant, they were under the circumstances probably the best counterbalance and tonic she could have had.

“Of course,” Lucy continued, “if it was a purely social affair, I could get Charlie Ashton to stuff the papers to the limit. If he is my cousin, I must say that he managed to syndicate the account of the Parkses' musicale most adroitly (of course, though, you didn't

read that yesterday). The main description — gowns and all that — was the same in each, but Charlie contrived to let each reporter have some extra item that fitted his paper specially. A little more about the music for one, details of the picture gallery for another, the brand of champagne used for a third, upholstery for a fourth, and so on. Come to think of it, I remember something about his saying that a reporter on the *Daily Forum* was a chum of his at Harvard. I might try and see what Charlie can do, but I'm afraid, as far as serious news goes, even his chum wouldn't swallow him."

"Oh, Lucy, Lucy! can't you see it is not *stuffing* and *swallowing* that I want, but for people to know that father is really ill and not shamming — that we are not all combining in a dreadful game of deceit?"

"Do be content, child, to let the talk wear itself out. From what the doctor told my father this morning, your father may be a long time like this — weeks and months perhaps — even if by and by he comes to himself. It isn't like a toothache that will be over to-morrow. You can't rush out on the avenue and pull the people up here in flocks to see for themselves, though by to-morrow, just as soon as society has made up its mind what it ought to do, you'll have plenty of callers. You told me yourself that the result of the consultation was that everything hinges on quiet.

"By the way, there were two reporters clamouring at the lift when I went out, one actually trying to bribe the boy to tell whether your father was really here in the apartment. I sent them scurrying in a hurry, I can tell you. Listen! I believe that there is another at the door now; anyway, some one is asking for you. I think I heard the words *Daily Forum*," and Lucy pulled aside the curtain, and going to the angle in the hallway peered down its length to where the maid was talking in whispers to a tall somebody in pantaloons.

"Yes, it is a reporter," said Lucy, stepping back noiselessly. "Sellers is trying to shoo him out, but he's all inside the door and asking, not a bit humbly, to see 'a member of the family.' Watch and see how long it will take me to get rid of him," and Lucy pulled on and buttoned her gloves, which, on coming in, she had begun to take off, with a gesture as though fists were to take part in the encounter, if necessary.

Brooke, who had been listening to Lucy, yet not looking at her, with eyes fixed on the crumpled paper before her, suddenly sprang to her feet, the warning flash returning to her eyes, saying: "Don't go; I will see this man myself, and please remember, Lucy, whatever I may say or do, you are not to speak. No, don't leave the room. I want you to stay by me, but this matter of father's feigning illness is an affair of honour that only one of the family can conduct."

Going quickly down the hall, she relieved the harassed maid by indicating to the visitor that he was to follow her, at the same time making a gesture to caution silence, as she guided him back to the den.

What he first saw on entering the room was the tall, straight figure of a young woman, back turned, half a hat and one cheek outlined against the lace drapery, through which she was looking into the street with a frozen fixedness, as if her very life depended upon not moving or turning the fraction of an inch. His second glance rested on the other woman, who, having preceded him, was standing by the desk corner, half supporting herself by it. She raised her head with its wreath of ash-brown hair proudly, and looked him in the face with eyes in which anger struggled with a pleading expression, in keeping with the heavy shadows that underlay them.

After moistening her lips once or twice nervously, Brooke spoke: "You asked to see one of the family, and said it was important that you should. If you are a gentleman, as you appear to be, of course you would not have come at such a time on trivial business. I am Brooke Lawton; what do you wish to ask?"

For an instant the young fellow hesitated, thoroughly abashed; he had met with a variety of experiences in following his vocation of news collecting, but never before had he felt so much like beating a retreat, or his

errand seemed so intrusive. Without any special claim to good looks or great stature, he had a certain clear-cut distinctiveness of feature, a mouth that stood the harsh test of the shaved upper lip, and eyes that, though they opened lengthwise rather than wide, looked as if they would take in the surroundings and atmosphere as well as the main object on which they were focussed.

While he hesitated the newspaper which Brooke still clutched attracted him, and as he read its title he divined that Brooke had overheard the name he had just given the maid at the door and already associated him with the sneering article. Laying the card, which the maid had refused, upon the table, he said quietly, but with an earnestness that carried conviction: "I am Tom Brownell of the *Daily Forum*, the sheet you have in your hand. I know that there was a nasty leader in this morning's issue that was slipped in, no one seems to know how, by some one who had animus or was hard hit in this T. Y. D. Q. deal. We pride ourselves upon getting at the truth of things that concern the public, so I have come here to settle for once and all the question of Mr. Lawton's reported serious illness, by direct communication with some one of his family."

"You mean that you wish to know if my father is really ill? Then people do doubt it and think he may be merely hiding to avoid inquiry?" said Brooke, who

now had full control of the voice that her friends called silvery, but which now had more of steel in its ring.

"Moreover, you expect to learn the truth by *asking* one of his family — what will that amount to if they choose to aid and abet the illness that your paper hints is part of a well-arranged covering of a retreat? If I should tell you that night before last, while my mother and I were waiting for him to return to dinner, my father had come home, unknown to us or the maids, letting himself in with a latch-key, which he used so seldom that we had forgotten its existence; when finally, attracted by a light under the door of this room, we opened it, he was in this chair, unconscious, stricken with apoplexy, his hand by the receiver of the overturned telephone; since then, though as far as physical life goes he is living, he has neither moved nor spoken nor recognized any one, nor can he swallow, and such liquid food as he has taken is given artificially,—if I tell you all this, still how can you be sure it is the truth?"

"Please, please, Miss Lawton, I am shocked and awfully grieved and ashamed. Don't be so hard on yourself and on me as to think that I dreamed of any such condition existing. We reporters do not rejoice in the misfortunes of others. But that it is not the time for such things, I could tell you that one of the reasons I had in beginning life in this way was to get to the bottom of things, and see if some people at least didn't really

want to tell and hear the truth in the newspapers. Of course I will believe what you tell me, and all that remains is for me to apologize for pushing in upon you and — go as quickly as possible. I only wish I could help or do something to ease you.”

“You forget that I have told you nothing,” said Brooke, hesitating and catching at the throat of her blouse as if she wished to pull it away and give herself more room to breathe — “I only said *if*, and if you are looking for truth, to be certain you must see it, not ask about it.” Then, as the new thought grew upon her, and she realized that her mother was asleep, the tragedy fled from her eyes, that she had fixed upon the face of the reporter, — who, fast losing his self-possession, stood looking uncomfortable and foolish, turning his hat about by its rim like an applicant for a situation, — her entire poise had altered, and she seemed several inches taller.

“Oh, Mr. Brownell, don’t you see that the only way that you can help us in telling the truth about father is by seeing for yourself? Put down your hat and come with me —” and before he had recovered from his astonishment, Brooke grasped Tom Brownell by the wrist and literally led him from the room, up the hallway, not toward the entrance but along the side passage, where the electricity had not yet been turned on and which was in a dim and uncertain light.

Pausing before the door of Adam Lawton's room, and without releasing her hold of Brownell's wrist, she turned the handle carefully, entered, and was standing with her companion in the shadow of the bed before the nurse at the opposite side realized that any one had come in, or could even raise her hand in caution. No one spoke, and the footsteps on the thick rug that covered the floor made no sound — the breathing of the pale figure prone upon the bed was the only vibration even of the air.

For two, perhaps three, minutes, that held an eternity of torture to Brownell, who stood with bent head, they remained, so that no detail could escape his notice. Then Brooke led him back to the den, leaving the nurse in grave doubt as to what manner of man this might be who had seemingly been forcibly led into the room where, by the doctor's orders, no one but mother and daughter were to be admitted.

The moment that the curtains had closed behind the two, Lucy Dean turned from the window with a suddenness that might be described as a bang, except that no noise went with the motion. Drawing two or three long breaths, as a relief to her suppressed speech, she crossed the room and picked up the reporter's card, turned it over and over and, reading the name with deliberation, put it in her pocket. "Thomas Brownell, Jr., the *Daily Forum*," she repeated, at the same time

making a mental note that the card itself was of good quality and engraved, not printed, an unusual occurrence with the average reporter. Spying his hat, she next seized upon that, discovering at a single glance the name of a maker of good repute and Brownell's own address, at a comfortable though inexpensive bachelor inn, stamped in gilt letters on the band. Hearing a slight rustling in the hall, she returned to her post by the window, but, instead of standing, she had thrown herself into a chair, half facing the room, by the time that the two returned.

Nothing further was said as to what had been seen. Brownell picked up his hat, preparing to leave as quickly as possible, yet he could not but notice that Lucy Dean, who by this time had turned wholly toward the room, was looking at him with an expression half quizzical, half challenging.

Brooke dropped wearily into the chair by the desk; the strain of the last hour had been greater than what she actually felt; she had been hurried swiftly to face stern realities, which all her life, though through no choice of her own, had been to her a side issue in which she took no part or responsibility, and which she was never allowed to question. Then, seeing that the reporter was standing and evidently at a loss how to go, she went forward with extended hand, saying, very gently, "Good-by. I think I may trust you not to mis-

understand my father's illness now." Turning to the figure by the window, now all on the alert, she said, "Lucy, dear, will you please show Mr. Brownell the way out, there are so many turns in this inner hall?" Then, as Lucy raised her eyebrows in disgusted question marks, Brooke continued, "Ah, forgive me! this is my dear friend, Miss Dean, Mr. Brownell, and" — a little smile hovered around the corners of her mouth in spite of herself — "you may be very sure that she will never tell you anything but the whole truth!"

Then, as the two girls changed places and Lucy led the way down the main hall, Brooke reseated herself before the desk, that might tell so much if it only could, folded her arms upon it, hiding her weary eyes in them. Had she done right or wrong in letting a stranger see her father's real condition? Would it make outside conditions better or worse? Why had the doctor given out such evasive bulletins? Well, the die was cast, and something within told her that from that hour, when she had taken the family responsibility upon herself, she would have to bear it.

* * * * *

As Tom Brownell crossed the rug that lay before the outer door of the Lawton apartment, something between it and the tiled flooring slid under the pressure of his foot. Checking his first impulse to pass on and get out as quickly as possible, he turned back, even

though the door itself was open, and, lifting the corner of the rug, picked up two thin keys, one smaller than the other, that were joined by a steel ring. Accustomed to fit two and two together rapidly, he involuntarily glanced at the spring lock on the door to see if they belonged to it, but found it of a different pattern. Stepping outside, the better to see by the hanging electric light, he found that the keys bore no name or mark other than figures, probably the factory number of keys of a fine make. Turning to Lucy, who had already come into the main hall and, half closing the door behind her, was watching him, he muttered a hasty apology for his curiosity concerning the keys, saying: "To me unfamiliar keys have always had a strange fascination, for all my life I have expected to find one that would unlock a mystery. These probably belong to some of Mrs. or Miss Lawton's possessions — a travelling bag or jewel case. Will you please take charge of them? And thank you for showing me the way out," turning up the corridor as he spoke.

"You needn't thank me for showing you the way, as you evidently don't know it," said Lucy; "that is, unless you have professional reasons for going down in the luggage lift with trunks, baby wagons, clothes-baskets, and scrubbing pails. No, you needn't raise your eyebrows, I'm not English or infected with Anglo-mania either, simply I'm to the point, and *luggage lift*

is a much more smooth and pronounceable expression than baggage elevator, don't you think?

"To the right—there you are! Not running? Why, the thing was all right when I came in not an hour ago, but I've noticed that the power has a way of giving out, or the machinery needs oiling, about the time the man might be supposed to want an afternoon nap. You'll have to walk downstairs. Good afternoon. Oh, by the way, do you happen to know Charlie Ashton? I beg his pardon, *Carolus*, though I only promised to call him that at his studio teas. He had a chum at college, he said, with a literary and reformatory streak, who a year ago had cut away from his father's business, and incidentally his own fortune, and was climbing into journalism, not in at the top story, but up the cellar stairs. I've rather forgotten his name. He doesn't chance to be you, does he?"

"I'm afraid he does, and that Ashton has guyed me unmercifully to you, in spite of all the good turns that he has done me. But as I am myself, you must be his cousin, Miss Dean, of whom he talks so much at the club. I did not quite catch what name Miss Lawton said."

"I am Lucy Dean, and I dare say that he has talked about me even at so reprehensible a place as the club. Talking about me, I fear, is a bad habit that a great many of my friends have. I also know that he didn't

call me Miss Dean. What club was it? What did he call me? Lucyfer is his pet title — and what did he say?"

"Oh, Miss Dean, it wasn't the way you mean at all. I was lunching, at his invitation, with him at the Players, — quite by ourselves on my word, and — he — well, he did call you Lucyfer, and said it expressed your stand-off way and all that; but he declared you were the best chum a fellow ever had, and if he wanted a studio entertainment to be a corking success, he always had you pour tea. If I hadn't been spending all my time the last year climbing up the cellar stairs, as you express it, I should have begged him to ask me to one of the teas; but I'm out of that sort of thing, for good and all, you see."

Lucy flushed slightly, an odd thing for her, and then said suddenly, holding out her right hand, both having been held behind her, after a habit she had, until this moment: "You are keen to avoid teas, they are horribly stupid; the cigarette smoke makes one's eyes weak, and the Saké punch does for the rest of one's head, and unless we act like mountebanks and shock people so that they forget to be bored, no one would come twice. Ask Charlie to bring you up to the house some afternoon, as you live so near to him, about five for a cup of real tea. No, don't thank me, it is not an invitation. It's years since I've taken the responsibility

of giving one to a man, — certainly not since I was eighteen; you must take the responsibility of coming upon yourself!"

"As you have never seen me until this afternoon, and I only moved over from — well, let's call it the Borough of Queens — last month, how could you know where I live?" queried Brownell, looking up with a quizzical expression, and passing over the first part of her speech, not because he did not heed it, but for the reason of a certain Indian instinct he had of picking up trails as he went along, that helped him not a little in his work.

Lucy flushed furiously, this time to the roots of her hair, sought refuge for a single instant in subterfuge, but finding herself fairly caught, throwing her head up, stood with hands again clasped behind her, and lips parted, smiling at the man who had already gone two steps downward on the stairs when she had called the halt.

"You say that you are seeking for truth with a fountain pen and a stenographer's note-book, also Brooke says that I always speak the truth — attention! I saw your address in your hat this afternoon!"

Brownell, who was at that moment holding his hat against his chest, looked anxiously at the top of the crown, wondering if it had become transparent.

"No, I didn't see *through* the hat, it's not my way; I looked *in it* when you were out of the room, because I

wanted to know where it was bought! A woman can tell a great deal by that! The biped *I* call a *man* never buys a department-store hat, for instance, he'd rather wear a second-hand one first. Well, yours did not come from a department store, neither was it second-hand; in fact, it was painfully new, address and all!"

Then Lucy Dean turned on her heel with right-about-face rapidity and vanished around the corner of the corridor; while Tom Brownell, half angry, half fascinated, and wholly amazed, went down the marble stairs two steps at a time, a difficult feat, and one that would have made the very correct man at the door suspect that the visitor had been summarily ejected, if it had not been for the expression of Brownell's face, which, by the time he reached the bottom stair, wore a decidedly satisfied smile.

CHAPTER VIII

TRANSITION

WHEN Lucy Dean returned to the den, she found Brooke leaning upon the desk, her head still pillowed by her arms, and fast asleep. Checking her first impulse to waken Brooke and discuss the episode of the reporter, Lucy stood thinking a moment, looked at the clock, then, drawing a sheet of paper toward her, wrote a few words upon it in vigorous upright characters, placed it where the sleeper could not fail to see it the moment her eyes opened, and, after rearranging her furs, that she had thrown off when she had returned from her walk, vanished from the room.

Her coming and going made a mental movement, for there had been no sound. Brooke raised her head, and looking about in a dazed way spied the note, which said, "As everybody and thing seems to be asleep, have gone home to dine with father; will be back before ten."

It was a positive relief to Brooke to be quite alone for a few hours, and it would also give her the chance to see the physicians more satisfactorily; they were due about six.

Going to her own room, she found her mother had returned to the sick room, so, slipping on a wrapper and loosening the tension of hair-pins, she busied herself by laying away in closet and dresser various things that had lain about since two nights before, which Olga, the maid, under stress of confusion, had neglected. Taking up her great chinchilla muff from a chair, she was shaking it in an absent-minded fashion before putting it in its box, when something slipped from it and fell lightly to the carpet. Groping in the dim light, she picked up, not her card case, as she expected, but the silk-covered catalogue of the Parkses' pictures and the souvenir menu in its frame of silver filigree. It was only two days since she had put them in her muff, but it seemed almost as if she were looking back from another world.

The catalogue naturally opened to the little reproduction of Marte Lorenz' picture. Cutting it carefully from the page, she slipped it into the silver frame, which chanced to be of the exact size, and setting it upon the dressing table, turned on the light above. Somehow the sight of it gave her comfort more than anything else could, and the separation of circumstances and distance seemed suddenly to have grown less. Whatever the interpretation of the picture might be, whatever else might tide, she had entered into and formed a part of the artist's first serious work, and even if they never

met again, they would be comrades upon the canvas as long as it lasted. For, in spite of the veiling of both the likenesses by certain subtle touches, it did not obliterate the characteristics of the two; and the longer that Brooke gazed upon the picture the stronger grew her conviction that, under guise of an attractive composition, it was he and she that Lorenz had painted, that he had bound together forever by some mystical inspiration.

Still Brooke did not formulate her feelings toward this man who had been the first one to tell her the truth when an untruth or evasion would have had a pleasanter sound; such a thing did not occur to her. Lucy Dean would have dragged her emotion into the electric light, diagnosed, and duly labelled it at once. Neither did Brooke kiss the portrait nor put it under her pillow, nor hide it away in her orris-scented drawer for sentiment's sake or to feed mystery, as many a girl would have done; but as the light glared upon the glass she turned it out, and lighting a small green candle of bayberry wax, that stood upon her desk, placed it near the frame so that its rays fell obliquely in accord with the picture's scheme of light, while the pungent fragrance of the wax wafted like incense at a shrine.

As she stood thus, the outer door closed, a squeaky tread awkwardly muffled came along the hallway, and stopping outside her door made her turn hastily. With-

out further ado the door opened, and a pair of lean, sloping shoulders and a freckled face topped by a mop of sandy hair parted the curtain, while two dull, greenish hazel eyes, very round and wide open, explored the room to the very corners with an expression of apprehension. Evidently being satisfied with the result, the rest of the six feet of overgrown boy followed the head, swinging a suit case before him with one hand, while he closed the door behind him with the other.

Brooke was almost startled into calling out aloud, but the figure clapped his hand to her mouth, and her voice dropped to a whispered "Oh, Cub, Cub, where did you come from? How did you hear?"

"Why, from school, to be sure, Sis, and I heard from Mummy, else I hadn't dared, or couldn't have come, — she sent me a ten, — for I spent all that was left of my quarterly on Pam; she was worth it, even if I'd have had to walk. I've only had her a month, but she knows my whistle out of twenty, and she just loves me; yes, she does, you ought to see her look at me with her head on one side. I've just left her below with the engineer till I saw if the coast was clear. I'll bring her up to you, unless you think father's likely to come in. Then I suppose I'll have to take her to the stable for keeps."

While the boy rattled on, Brooke was recalling the fact of her brother's letter, and that her mother had told her about sending for him to come home in spite of

everything. He had come, then, in response to that and knew nothing of what had happened.

"Father will not come in," she said, going to him and speaking very quietly to gain time, also because she did not know exactly how best to break the matter to this sixteen-year-old brother of hers, who, partly through perversity, but chiefly because his father had never understood his temperament or considered him as an individual, was the sort of cross between a mule and a firebrand dubbed "an impossibility" by people in general.

"Who or what is Pam?"

"She! She's the finest year-old brindled pup you ever rolled your eyes on, only a quarter English for bone and grit, and the rest Boston for looks. Her father's got eight firsts, and Bill Bent's father owns the mother, and she's reckoned the finest bitch shown this year. I paid fifty, but if Bill hadn't been my chum, two hundred was the price! I called her Pam, after Mummy, you know, and I thought maybe she'd keep her for her own if father sends me off again to where they won't have Pam. Lots of women have Boston bulls to ride out with them every day," while, at the likelihood of catastrophe in connection with his pet, the animation that had lighted the boy's face and shown the improving possibility of latent manhood died out, a weary look replacing it, and the Cub dropped into a

lounging chair and began to cough, holding his hand to his side.

"If you think I'd better not bring her up, I'll take her round to the stable right away," he said, when the fit had passed over.

"Leave her downstairs for now," said Brooke; "I'm not sure if there is any stable to-day," and sitting on the arm of the chair, untangling his mop of hair with her strong, slender fingers, a proceeding that he did not resent as roughly as usual, she began to give him a brief history of the past two days. At first he looked at her in amazement, as if he thought that she had lost her mind, then his head sank, and when she finished and tried to take his hand, he pulled it away, and, turning from her, buried his face in the chair back, breaking into long sobs that almost strangled him, and that he could not stifle.

In vain Brooke tried to comfort him, to find if there was anything on his mind of which she did not know. Her brother had never been emotional in this way, and though she knew that her father's strictness with the boy was a sign that all his hope was in him, she never dreamed the Cub would care so much, if at all. Pushing her away, he staggered toward the door, his face still hidden by his hands.

"Where are you going? you must be very quiet," said Brooke, getting between him and the curtain.

"To mother! I want my mother! I must have her all to myself, and father can't prevent it now!" Then, to her amazement, Brooke realized that her brother's tears were not born of grief, but of hysterical relief at release from a mental and physical bondage that had fretted and cramped and warped his very soul.

"Stay here," she begged, "and I will bring mother to you!" Turning back, with a look that told the boy better than words that she understood his outburst, and did not brand it as foolishness, she said: "Be careful of her, for I know now that you and I must be father and mother, and do some hard thinking, and perhaps acting, in these next few weeks, for they cannot. Will you stand by me, Adam?" Then the boy did not push away the hands that rested on his shoulders, but held his sister close, awkwardly, it is true, but as he had not clung to her since the old days in the downtown house, when as a little girl she stooped over his crib to kiss him good night.

The doctors came, and when they left, Mrs. Lawton went to her son. An hour passed, dinner was served, and still the two did not come out. Brooke went to the door, then prepared and carried in a tray of food, eating her own meal afterward in solitary silence that was very soothing to her.

For the first time she had been able to see the specialist alone, and put such definite questions to him as dis-

persed the usual non-committal generalities, while at the same time it convinced him that here was a member of the family to whom the truth might and should be told. It was possible that her father might recover from this attack, if there was no further hemorrhage; also that the clot that plugged the brain channel might be absorbed, the paralysis of face, leg, and arm relax, and speech and memory return, so that though full vigour would never again be his he might still have years of placid living and enjoyment. Or else he might regain his physical faculties without the brain cloud ever lifting. As for medicine, a few simple regulations and then quiet must do its work, coupled with constant care. His failure and its agitation had struck the blow, and of this cause not the faintest suggestion must reach him or be even whispered of, for in such cases no one may precisely tell how much of conscious unconsciousness exists.

Meanwhile the laws of trade must be carried on, and others, to keep their rights, sift and settle Adam Lawton's affairs as far as possible, before Brooke could learn what they as a family had or did not have and by it measure what might be done. For neither mother nor daughter knew of the extent of this final venture of all, and beyond keeping domestic accounts and holding a joint key with her father to a box in an up-town safe deposit company, where family papers and some secu-

rities belonging to her mother were kept, Brooke was no partner in her father's affairs. In fact one of the things, Mr. Dean said, that had hurried the crisis and complicated its untangling was the habit that Adam Lawton had formed of holding aloof from the advice and confidence of his fellows.

* * * * *

Later in the evening, when the Cub emerged from Brooke's room, he found that she had taken the nurse's place by her father and the library was empty. While he walked about the room restlessly, alternately enjoying his comparative liberty or wondering what he had best do about his dog, something led him to cross the hall and turn the angle to the den, where, to his intense astonishment, amid a blaze of lights, that contrasted vividly with the semi-dark silence of the other rooms, was Lucy Dean, in the great leather-covered Morris chair, upon one arm of which sat the bull pup, whose persuasive pink tongue had just succeeded at the moment he entered in touching Lucy's nose in affectionate salute.

"Brooke told me about the dear, and I went down and fished her out of an old box, where they had bedded her, just in time to save her from spoiling her figure with a whole bowl of oatmeal and soup," said Lucy, in answer to the question on the Cub's face. "You've got to be very particular about feeding her, remember,

or she'll grow groggy and sleepy and wheeze, instead of keeping her sporting blood up—"and Lucy held out her unoccupied left hand to the boy, who, after the callowness and fervour of youth, regarded this friend of his sister's, eight years his senior, with her dash and vim, as the combination of everything admirable and adorable and himself her equal in years.

"No, I'm not going to kiss you this time," she continued, leaning back in the chair, as he half stooped behind her; "I've just transferred that to Pam here. Why? Because you've gained a year and two inches since I saw you when you came home last Christmas—and sixteen is a good stile to stop at. Then hands off, young man, and no kisses outside the family until you are twenty-one and able to shoulder your own responsibilities." The Cub growled out something half sulkily.

"Yes, I know I never had an own brother, but I've been a good sister to more of you boys than were ever born even in a Mormon family, and I've kept them all for good friends, just such as you're going to be. No, don't mope and go over in the corner, because within five minutes you'll simply have to come back again and sit by Pam and me—so you might as well do it now.

"That's it, stretch and be comfortable! See, chains wouldn't keep Pam away from you now! Do you know I don't blame you for squandering your last penny on

this bull pup — her points are all right, she has an angel disposition; but she doesn't forget to whom she belongs for a single minute — it was all I could do to drag her past your coat in the hall! But suppose she barks, how can you keep her here?"

"That's the point, I must take her over to the stable right away; but you'll be here when I come back, won't you? I think Brooke said you were stopping here."

"I was, but I guess now that you are here, I'll go home. I stayed so that Brooke shouldn't be lonely; besides, I have your room."

"That don't count," protested the Cub, "I can sleep here just as well as not."

"Oh, there is one other thing," added Lucy. "I'm not so sure who there is at the stable or how they would treat Pam, so best not take her there. I'm so glad that you have come home, boy. I dined with dad to-night and tried to learn as much as I could about this money trouble of your father's, and it is about as bad as can be, and though of course it may be some time before it can be known exactly how things stand, there is little doubt but when what's left of the apple is divided there won't be even the core for you all. Of course, if the illness had not come, some arrangement might have been made to tide things over. Suppose you take Pam down to our house to-night, and stay there and have

a talk with dad. He will tell Brooke all he knows tomorrow. Don't go yet, it's only nine, half an hour later will do as well as now.

"Tell me, what is the matter with you, honour bright? Are you really sick or only sort of lazy and shilly-shally, obstinate, discouraged, and crazy to get out of jail? I know the symptoms, for I've had them all one by one, in my youth, doing everything by rule, duty the watchword, more mathematics the penalty for forgetting it, and dyspepsia the result. *My sons* shall be reared in the open, if they never get beyond horse-breaking and cattle-breeding," and a shiver of sympathy ran down Lucy's flexible spine, branching off in an odd twisting of her fingers that sent her handkerchief, that she had rolled into a ball to amuse the pup, flying across the room, much to the amusement of Pam, who caught it, and made his master jump to rescue the roll of cambric and lace from her investigating paws.

"Honour bright, Lucy, it's the being shut up so much, and the confounded mathematics and knowing that I never seem to satisfy the old man on top of that. If he'd only let me work at something I like, and learn to do something out-of-doors, but at this rate I think I'm getting consumption —" and the Cub gave a really dismal cough.

"Of course a man must know how to count, and a

few little things like that, no matter what he does," said Lucy, so seriously that the boy did not at first realize that she was mocking him; "for whether you handle your own or some other person's money, or eggs and potatoes, counting will be a painful necessity.

"Oh, oh! what is this?" she exclaimed, as in handing her back her handkerchief the thumb and forefinger of his right hand caught her eye. These were stained a brownish yellow on the inside. Spreading the fingers apart, she looked the boy in the face, and he flushed scarlet under his freckles.

"Been smoking cigarettes, on the sly, of course, and consequently in a hurry, swallowed the smoke, and sometimes chewed the butts to pulp! There is half the cause why your head won't work right, as well as one reason why you are lanky and cough. See here, young man, do you know that only *what-is-its* and *mistakes* smoke cigarettes? *Men* smoke pipes, or cigars if they can afford them; and I'm going to give you a pipe on your next birthday, with Pam's head carved on a meerschaum bowl. I'll get Charlie Ashton to order it to-morrow; he knows a fellow who carves pipes that are perfect dreams. Meantime not a whiff or sniff of a cigarette. Yes, of course it's hard to stop, they all say that, but really, Cub, it's a horrid trick. Yes, I know all about it; I tried cigarettes once myself. Empty your pockets quick and swear off."

At first the boy had looked annoyed, and a curious, obstinate expression, akin to that of a horse putting back his ears, crossed his features, flattening them; but it only lasted a moment. It was impossible to be angry with Lucy, for her tongue was pointed with common sense born of experience, and there was never anything censorious or priggish in her strictures.

So the Cub produced two packages of cigarettes, an amber holder, and a silver match-box, and piled them in the outstretched hand of his mentor.

"Keep the match-box, and we'll give those things to the 'grasshoppers' that go around the street picking up cigar stumps with a spike in the end of a stick." So saying, the vigorous young woman opened the window, and with a sidewise motion skittled the cigarettes through the air into the street below, much to the alarm of an old gentleman upon whose shoulders a shower from the first box fell. He had come out of the house to sample the weather and immediately returned for umbrella and goloshes, while the second box landed intact on the top of a passing hansom, much to the driver's satisfaction.

Then the Cub brought his suit case, and, picking up Pam, went to carry out Lucy's suggestion, while she, after watching him go, said half aloud:—

"He's all right if you only understand him. I'll give Brooke a hint. I shouldn't wonder if this smashup

will give him a push and his chance — for somebody has got to go to work in this family, and pretty quick, too, according to father's ideas.

"Heigh-ho, I wonder what Tom Brownell will have to say in the *Daily Forum* to-morrow. Will he make a sensation column of us, — I mean of Brooke and her object lesson, — or will he turn his back on the devil and give out a simple, dignified statement regardless of making copy? No, I don't wonder either, I'll gamble he's straight as a plumb-line. Gracious, what did I do with those keys?" and Lucy began feeling in the gold chain bag that hung from her belt, as, hearing Brooke leave her father's room, she went to join her.

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The *Daily Forum* not only corrected its insinuation of the previous day, but printed a further statement, the sincerity and judiciousness of which at once made the financial disaster of Adam Lawton secondary to his physical collapse. This allowed the numerous family friends and acquaintances the chance to offer sympathy with perfect good taste, which in the conventional society of the Whirlpool usually takes the place of more spontaneous warmheartedness.

For many days a stream of callers came and went from the St. Hilaire, some content merely to leave a card with inquiries, others asking for Mrs. Lawton or Brooke, emphasizing their offer of "doing some-

thing" with a hand-shake, but asking no prying questions. Still others, as "intimate friends" of the family, as the days wore on and it was definitely known that though the creditors might in time receive dollar for dollar, there would be nothing over, not only called, but stayed and mingled advice and chiding with their verbal sympathy.

"Reduced to absolute beggars," was the term that Mrs. Ashton, Lucy Dean's aunt, applied to the Lawtons when discussing the affair at a luncheon she was giving, where all the guests were women of Mrs. Lawton's class and set, though few of them had her gentle breeding, "and if Mrs. Lawton and quixotic Brooke had not had such ridiculous scruples as to what belonged to whom, quite a lump might have been rescued for them, my brother says."

"My dear Susie," protested Mrs. Parks, who since her housewarming was fast advancing in power and called several exclusives by their first names by request, "that is not a fault that can be often found with any one nowadays. The Senator says that through all this business it was precisely the same trait in Adam Lawton of not being quite willing to knock down others and make them serve as scaling ladders that dealt him out at last."

"The question is now," continued Mrs. Ashton, "What shall we be expected to do for them? They will leave

the St. Hilaire the 1st of January; Mr. Dean has manipulated things so far as that for them, and he wants them to put Mr. Lawton into a partly endowed sanatorium of which he himself is a trustee, as all the physicians say he must be kept out of turmoil. The Cub, as they call the boy, is rather out of health, so that a year on a school-ship would be a good place for him. They say if he went into an office at once, as Mr. Dean expected, it would probably kill him.

"Brooke, of course, will have to take up her painting, teach, and paint bonbon boxes for Cuyler and Gaillard, or menus for us. We can all use influence to get her work of that sort, and it will help out for a time until we get sick of her style probably. Lucy swears that Brooke shall live with her; we shall see. I think that there will be something a year from some little investment they have, with which Mrs. Lawton might board in some cheap place, not of course in New York, but Brooklyn or up in the Bronx."

"Don't, pray don't suggest boarding in those dreadful places for that sweet, sensitive woman; it would be like putting lilies-of-the-valley in a saucepan," cried Mrs. Parks with warm-hearted energy; "it's too awful! I would be only too glad to have her live with me, if she could put up with the whirl of it, and Brooke too. I often wish that I had an elder sister in the house with whom I could talk things over comfortably and not have

them spread over the face of the earth. The hard part of this is that whatever is done the family will be split to kindlings, and it's no joke parting a mother and son!" For be it said that since the arrival of the belated and beruffled little man in the Easter-egg crib, though Mrs. Parks's social ambition had rather increased than diminished, the cold-heartedness that is often a part of a social career was altogether lacking.

"Besides, suppose that Mr. Lawton comes back to himself suddenly, for you know they say that it sometimes happens when this aphasia (I'm always possessed to call it *aspasia*, after the snake that bit Cleopatra) lifts — how will he feel to find himself in an institution and his family scattered?"

"I don't see that it concerns us," said Mrs. Ashton, shrugging her shoulders. "If he had only died at once and been done with it, they would all have been comfortable, for my brother says that he carried a simply fabulous life insurance, and that the keeping it up was what made him so economical."

* * * * *

It was the last week in December, Christmas week. Brooke and her mother sat opposite each other in the den in a silence that was keeping the brain of each more active than the most rapid speech. Although Adam Lawton had not spoken, the tension that had drawn his face had relaxed, and sensation was slowly returning

to-his foot, though his right hand was still quite useless. But while he took no apparent notice of what passed about him, his wife felt that his eyes dwelt upon her and followed her when she was in range, and only that morning he had feebly retained the hand she had laid within his upturned left palm. Recovery to a certain extent was possible, the physician proclaimed, with no further jars, and care and quietness; but how to secure this? Quiet is not always the inexpensive thing it seems. But with this new-born hope, everything else seemed unimportant to her.

The apparent worst had been carefully explained to them and accepted several days ago, but there had been yet more, for when Brooke had that morning gone to the safety box, where some jewels of her mother's,—a necklace and other things seldom worn,—and some dozen railroad bonds, the little property that came to her from the Brookes, with some shares of an industrial stock, a birthday gift to Brooke at twenty-one, were stored, the box was empty!

Thoughts would come that must not find words even between themselves as they sat there. They both believed in Adam Lawton's honour and that if he could speak he would explain; and finally, as the tension tightened into agony, Brooke went over to her mother, and kneeling by her said, "Don't try to think it out now, mother; some day we shall know, and now it is how to live and work until that day comes."

As for Brooke, she had lived five years in those few weeks. Every word that she had ever heard of criticism of those in their present position came back to her, the cruel discussion of Julia Garth at the musicale topping the list.

All the various suggestions, practical and problematical, for their future arrayed themselves mockingly in a row before her, but one and all they had their beginning in the separation of the family; not a single plan offered the remotest possibility of keeping it together.

That morning, after her finding of the empty box, Brooke had seen Mr. Dean in his office and learned definitely that the only income they could count upon after the new year was the interest upon her shares of stock, six hundred dollars a year — fifty dollars a month; for though the shares themselves were missing, as they stood in her name upon the company's books, the interest would keep on. Besides this, there would be a fund gathered here and there from articles she or her mother personally owned beyond question — a scant two thousand dollars.

One asset had been overlooked until that interview, the homestead at Gilead, Brooke's own property, asked for in a moment of sentiment and freely given her. Mr. Dean, knowing the place and location well, thought that, with good management, it might be sold at the right season for perhaps six or eight thousand dollars.

All these circumstances were pushed into Brooke's brain, jostling and crowding each other until it seemed hopeless to think. Even Lucy Dean, huffed because Brooke would not come to her for the rest of the winter or borrow money of her father to establish a little apartment where she could work at her painting, though she came as regularly as ever, had ceased to question or even offer cheer. And it seemed almost impossible for Brooke to tell her mother, in the face of hope, that Mr. Dean's plan of sending Adam Lawton to the sanatorium in the country seemed the only feasible solution at the present moment. As for her mother and herself, she would work for both, but not in anything obtained merely by the insecure path of social influence. It would be teaching drawing, of course, for too well she realized Lorenz' words that as a painter of pictures she had not yet "awakened," and in the world of competition the winners of a single prize or the acclaim won in charity bazaars is a damning introduction.

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The entrance of some one brought Brooke to herself, a shrill voice that replied in a high key to the answer of the maid, "In the den? Then we'll go right in very informally, no need to take the cards," and Mrs. Ashton, followed by a married daughter, entered quite abruptly, the elder lady looking at the two women with something akin to disapproval on her florid face, an

expression that Brooke interpreted instantly. Mrs. Ashton was becoming bored at the situation and had a feeling of resentment that all her opportunities of becoming the patroness of the Lawtons were vanishing.

She still had one more card to play, a trump she considered it, and she suddenly drew it from the pack and cast it before Mrs. Lawton. A widower, more than passing rich, though not of her precise set, with two daughters just leaving school, had intrusted her to find a well-bred New Yorker as chaperon and companion to travel with them until the next autumn, and then launch them tactfully in the Whirlpool. Any reasonable salary might be demanded — would dear Pamela like the chance? Six or eight months abroad would doubtless restore her tone and spirits.

Brooke's eyes flashed fire, Scotch fire not easily put out when once it was kindled; but Mrs. Lawton only grew a shade more pale, and said in her soft, slow accent, looking steadily at her friend, "Susan, you are forgetting Adam. How could I both go abroad and give him the care he will always need while he lives?"

For some reason the soft answer not only did not turn away wrath, but augmented it, and shortly the couple left; but alas for the treachery of portières — scarcely were the pair in the hall when, forgetting that it was not a door that closed behind them, Mrs. Ashton said, in an echoing whisper, "Care, while he lives indeed —

it's just as I said the other day, if Adam Lawton had only died at once and had done with it, those women, instead of being beggars, could have lived in luxury on his life insurance ! ”

With the harsh, insistent vibration of a graphophone, the words stung the ears of mother and daughter, who were standing where their guests had left them. A look of horror froze Mrs. Lawton's face to the immobility of a statue, while in Brooke's brain, still tingling with the other blow, the thoughts were suddenly clarified as if by fire, and she never noticed that the Cub had come in and was looking from one to the other in alarm.

“It is monstrous!” she choked out, clasping her mother in her strong arms. “Oh, mother, mother! do not look so, as if you were turning to stone! You shall not be torn from father; we will go together and keep together! Listen, you and he desired me and brought me into your world for love, and took the responsibility of me when I was helpless; now you shall come into mine and be my children, and I will bear the responsibility for that same love. Father needs country quiet; so be it; we will take him home to Gilead. It is my home, my very own in deed and truth, given so long ago that no creditor can grumble. I never have lived in the country, and I know nothing, you may say. What I do not know I can learn. At worst, with what I have we can be secure somehow for a year. Cousin Keith

has lived and worked there, so can I, and if only Adam will stand by me, I cannot fail. But you must trust me like a child, as I did you, and do not question."

A look of wondrous joy crept into the mother's eyes, but with it her strength gave way, and when she tottered and would have fallen, it was Adam who caught her, and as he held her with tender awkwardness, nodding at his sister as if in answer to her appeal, he jerked out, "You bet your life, Sis, I'll stand by the crowd, and won't it just suit Pam and me to get out of town!"

CHAPTER IX

THE RETURN

It was the 10th of January. At Gilead winter had been a-masking all through December, and played the part of a fantastic snow-draped Columbine in the Christmas pantomime where, the North Wind being piqued to keep his distance, she was wooed by the South and West Winds alternately amid a setting of warm noons, dramatic sunsets, and moonlight nights of electric clearness, to the song of the Moosatuk's mad racing.

With January the reign of the North Wind began in a wrath of sleet and ice that bound forest, field, and river also in cruel, glittering shackles, covering the wayside granaries and driving the faithful birds of the season, hooded and clad in sober garb of grays and russet, to beg from door to door like mendicant friars of old.

Even before its close, each day of the New Year had been checked by a double cross from the calendar that hung on the door of Keith West's pantry, as if by its complete obliteration she hoped to hurry time itself.

Waiting for others to act had never before fallen to Miss Keith's lot in life. For twenty years her comings

and goings, her waking and sleeping, and even the setting of the first spring brood of embryo broilers had depended upon herself alone, for she had long since substituted an incubator for that coy and freakish feathered female known as a setting hen. Consequently this delay at the very outset of a new order of things found her restless and in no very amiable mood. Also Judith Dow had written that, as Miss Keith had promised to come the first of the year, she had reserved her room and must charge her accordingly, which, as the whole affair was upon a nominal basis, irritated her not a little.

In writing to Adam Lawton of the determination to leave the farm, the 1st of January had been the date she had set for starting for Boston *en route* to Matrimony, and when, a short time after Christmas, Brooke had combined her reply to the unanswered letter with the announcement that she herself expected to go to take charge of the place as near the 1st of January as possible, Miss Keith had hastened to complete her arrangements.

Brooke had written concisely, yet with entire frankness; but even then Miss Keith did not compass the exact condition of her cousin's affairs, or understand that as far as his relation with the world stood he was as helpless and irresponsible as the day of his birth. She knew that money and health had been lost, but fancied that, after a few months' retirement, more

voluntary than enforced, as had been the case with one or two families of the wealthy summer colony at Stonebridge, every one concerned would swing back to the old pace again.

Nevertheless she took great pride in making the evidence of her thrifty stewardship apparent on every side. The hired man had been well-nigh frantic at the number of times that he had been obliged to whitewash spots that had dried thin in the cow and poultry houses. A fringe of unthreshed rye straw made a lambrequin over the entrance to the stall of Billy, the general utility horse with the long, common-sense face. The front gate, always removed from its hinges at the coming of frost, had been scrubbed before being stowed away in the attic, and the plant boxes that edged the front porch and held nasturtiums in summer were filled with small cedar bushes and branches of coral winterberry in remembrance of Brooke's youthful love of such things.

The outside condition of things gave Miss Keith much more satisfaction than did the inside arrangement of the house. Her only concern about them was lest the mischievous boy should upset everything and doubtless stone the cows, torment Laura, the sedate barn cat, and turn the laying hens out in the cold; for to her spinster mentality if there was a dubious quantity, it was the growing boy, the last straw under which the many-humped back of female patience must break.

She had considered the house the pink of perfection until she peopled it with New Yorkers accustomed to every luxury, and then the gay flowers of the chintz slip covers that hid the haircloth gloom of the parlour furniture began to pale and fail to hold their own, and the texture of the freshly laundered dimity curtains, those upstairs having wide hems, while those below were edged with tatting of the wheel pattern, seemed to grow coarser as the days went by.

And all the while that she bustled to and fro, now in the cellar to see that the stones had not slipped in the pork barrel and allowed the meat to rise above the brine, then to the attic to be sure that her personal possessions of bedding, linen, and tableware, neatly put up in barrel, bale, and bundle until her marriage and final move, did not take up more room than was necessary, — Tatters followed her, either so close to heel that he literally seemed to dog her footsteps, or else sitting a little way apart with his eyes fastened upon her with a blended look of dread and reproach. Then she would often drop whatever she held and raising his face (yes, Tatters had a face, not a “muzzle”) between her hands, plead with him to tell her what he made of it all and if he believed she could be happy away from Gilead, and if he thought that he could follow any one else to market, allow her to shake out his mat, and choose juicy bones that were not too hard for his middle-aged teeth. All of which

showed that she did not rejoice in thought at the *First Cause* as completely as would, under the circumstances, have been desirable; while Tatters understood that this was not the accustomed affectionate babble or the confidential discourse of everyday doings in which he was frequently consulted, and he would raise his head and give, not his usual howl belonging to moonlight nights, but a strange bay like an echo, deep down in his throat.

Three times in those ten bleak January days had she given what she declared aloud to be a "final dusting" to each room. Three times had she baked bread, cake, pies, and custard for the invalid (no, the third time she made boiled soft custard to break the monotony), and then hovered between the dread of waste and surfeit in consuming the food.

However, on the tenth day of waiting her spirits rose, for soon after breakfast Robert Stead stopped on his way back from Gilead, whither he rode daily, rain or shine, to the post-office, as the rural carrier went to Windy Hill but once a day and that in early afternoon, to say that he had just heard from Dr. Russell and expected him up from Oaklands that afternoon, as he was coming to meet Adam Lawton at the request of his New York physician, in order to see the invalid safely established after his precarious journey.

In addition to this bit of news, Stead brought a fine

pair of wild ducks, shot a few days previous, farther down where the river was not ice-locked, and he had taken the wise precaution of having them dressed by José, his Mexican man of all work, for in Miss Keith's agitation at the knowledge that her kinsfolk were actually coming that very day, the task of picking pinfeathers would have been impossible.

In fact her hands trembled so, as she took the basket from Stead, that, contrary to his habit of taciturnity, he questioned her closely as to her health, and if he could help her in any preparations, and finally, after leading Manfred to the stable, followed Miss Keith into the house only to find her in the kitchen seated, as Dr. Russell had some months before, with her face pressed against Tatters' ears in a vain effort to stifle her sobs.

"I've wished for kin so long that now they are coming it doesn't seem as if I could bear it," she said by way of explanation. "If it was only Adam and Brooke, I wouldn't mind; I've sampled her, and though she's full of spunk, she's as pleasant as if she never had a cent, but to think of that high-spirited southern woman, perhaps lording it over me, it's too much, even though I'm only going to hold over a day or two to give them the lay of the land, as it were. Then like as not their city help will take me for a servant, for they'll not likely bring less than two for all the cooking and the waiting that they are used to, which reminds me that

they'll need to use the living room to dine in, for of course they won't eat in the kitchen as I've done, and what with turning the south parlour into a bedroom (which it was in his mother's day) for Adam, so that he can get out on the porch easily, there won't be any best room at all.

"Would you help me move the table and dresser with the glass door into the living room? Larsen bangs furniture so when he does it, and the deal table from the summer kitchen can come here for the help."

Jumping up — "There's some one knocking now! Dear me, it's the Bisbee boy with a telegram. Open it, do, and give him a quarter from the shelf by the clock, for riding up with it," and Miss Keith sank back in the rocking chair and closed her eyes like some one about to have a tooth drawn, who dreaded the sight of the instruments.

Silent Stead opened the blue envelope with the studied deliberation with which he performed every act of life, except riding Manfred, at which time the two abandoned themselves to mutual impulse. Shaking out the sheet, he read slowly: —

"NEW YORK, January 10, 1904.

"TO MISS KEITH WEST, Gilead.

"Please meet us with closed carriage at Stonebridge, two-thirty. Baggage to Gilead.

"BROOKE LAWTON."

"To-day at two-thirty!" ejaculated Miss Keith, who, mind you, had been more than ready for ten days; "then there's no time to fix up the living room, or do more than sweep and tidy up and get dinner, — they will have to put up with the kitchen for once. Why do they get out at Stonebridge? It is three miles farther than Gilead Station, and a closed carriage means one of Bisbee's hacks, for the rockaway must go too for the help. Has that boy of his gone?" Stead hurried to the road, but the boy was disappearing down the third hill at a pace that forbade recall.

"I will go down and order the carriage for you," Stead volunteered, "and tell them to put in hot stones and plenty of rugs; it's a cold drive from Stonebridge, but they come that way doubtless because the express stops there and not at Gilead. They could not bring a man in Mr. Lawton's condition so long a journey in a way train."

"If you would, I should be so relieved, and one thing more. I know you make a point of keeping away from folks, especially women, and these are strangers to you; but they'll be so worried likely as not they'll hardly notice you. Now would you be so good as to meet them and see they find the carriage and get properly started, and tell Bisbee to keep to the lower road in spite of the trolley until they reach the third hill? It's far less jolty and better shovelled out.

"You see Brooke says, 'Please meet us,' and it doesn't look hospitable to send an empty hack, as if it was to meet a funeral; besides which there wouldn't be room, and I can't spare the time, though, as I suppose the boy is small, they could set him between."

"Yes, I will go to meet them," answered Stead, hesitating a moment and still looking at the telegram, which he folded absent-mindedly and dropped into his pocket. "I do not think you need fear seeing Mrs. Lawton. I knew her family and met her once long ago; she is a gentlewoman to her finger-tips, and such are never overbearing," and after making this unusually long speech Silent Stead went out for his horse, Tatters bounding in front of him joyously, for dogs and children always swarmed about the lonely man whenever they had the chance, and they alone, Dr. Russell excepted, were welcome at his retreat on Windy Hill.

Like many capable people, who fuss aimlessly when there is really little to do, but bring their best efforts to bear swiftly under stress, Miss Keith set in motion certain necessary preparations for an afternoon meal, which should be a compromise between a country dinner and supper, and then went to the south parlour, until a few days ago her pride and the most precise best room in the neighbourhood, and sitting quietly down with hands folded in her lap, took a final survey.

Something had suddenly changed her attitude toward

the room. She ceased thinking of it as her state apartment, sacred to sewing society meetings and the more formal and rare social function of a high tea to welcome the wife of a new minister, and now looked at it as it was to be, the bedroom to which her Cousin Adam was coming for rest, and as she sat there it occurred to her that it was the very room in which he had been born.

Then there stole over her one of those subtle inspirations called intuition, with which the Creator has blessed woman as a token of sympathy with their weaknesses and a reward for much unspoken suffering, and thereby more than bridged the difference of her physical inequality with man. If the hope was to bring Adam Lawton back to himself, what could be more suitable than that the surroundings should be those of his early youth?

Ringling the dinner bell out of the back door, the sign to Larsen that he was wanted, Miss Keith began by taking the decorated "fireboard" from before the wide fireplace, and brushing up the fragments of swallow's nests that had fallen down since the regular autumn clearing. Going to a deep closet under the back stairs, she pulled out a large bundle wrapped in papers and cloth, which being unrolled gave forth a pair of long-necked andirons, with oval head-pieces and curiously curved legs, made of what was known in the old days as princess metal, a warm-hued alloy of copper and

brass. Setting these in the fireplace, she directed Larsen, who now appeared in the carpet slippers without which he never dared come indoors, to bring in logs and lay a substantial fire with backlog, forestick, catstick, and kindling, such as would outlast a night, instead of the mere "splutter blaze that needs tending like a spoiled child," as she called the modern wood fire.

Next she had the ornate and hideous black-walnut bed, a product of the "ugly sixties," that she had long regarded as a patent of respectability, unscrewed, taken up garret, and put under the eaves, from which she unpacked the frame of a slender-limbed four-poster of mellow, unstained mahogany. The Wests had always been of plain farming stock, and had never possessed carved mahogany or beds of the famous pineapple pattern. Dull and lustreless as was the wood, she set the man to work with rags and a compound of beeswax, oil, and turpentine, of which she always kept a jar for brightening spotted furniture. Meanwhile she untied a bundle shaped like a pillow, and carefully unfolded curtains, valance, and tester of dimity, finished with a cross-stitch border, mended carefully here and there, and yellow with age.

Looking at the clock, which had not yet struck ten, she turned the fabric over carefully, evidently weighing something in her mind, the while saying aloud, "Yes, I'll simply scald them, and iron them out with a bit of

starch. To bleach them would take weeks, and besides this old dimity will never stand the strain."

While the irons were heating she returned to her reconstructive attempt. The canvas bottom was laced firmly to the bed frame, the bedding adjusted with mathematical precision, and finished with a cheerful patchwork quilt from one of the attic chests. From the floor of her own room she dragged a great rug made of rags in the herring-bone pattern, and spread it over the somewhat faded parlour carpet, which it concealed, all but a narrow border. A work-stand, with fat stomach and many little drawers, and an old chintz-covered English arm-chair, with high back and head-rest flaps at the top, were also brought to light and put in place, while the haircloth parlour set, in its flowered outer covering, suggestive of a gay domino worn over ministerial clothes, was distributed in living room and hall, the long sofa being obliged to seek refuge under the plant window in the angle of the kitchen itself.

Twelve o'clock saw the bed draperies ironed and fastened in place, the yellow hue of the dimity harmonizing with the painted woodwork and blending with the wall paper of a cheerful nosegay pattern that Brooke had chosen several years before, much to Miss Keith's disappointment, as at the time embossed papers with effects of gold, silver, and copper were much in vogue in Gilead.

Still not quite satisfied, Miss Keith swept into her apron all the accumulations of little meaningless nothings that covered table and mantel-shelf. Seeking for something with which to replace them, she gathered half a dozen books from the old desk case in the living room, and set a pair of iron candlesticks as sentinels on the corners of the mantel-shelf, to guard a row of polished shells of various sorts.

Raising the flap of the table near the west window, that coming between two closets formed a small bay, Miss Keith placed half a dozen geraniums upon it, that were rather overcrowding the plant window in the kitchen. Satisfied with that quarter of the room, she was haunted by the partial recollection of some bit of furniture that had once filled in the angle between chimney and door leading to the back stairs, yet refused to become definite. But presently the veil lifted, and going to the attic for the twentieth time that morning, she returned followed by a bumping sound, one bump for each stair of the two flights, twenty-six in all, and presently the light of the fire that had kindled slowly cast side-wise glances at a mahogany cradle, from under whose hood three generations of little Wests had first gazed out into life.

With a sigh of content Miss Keith folded her arms, searched every nook in the room with eyes into which there crept a moisture, born neither of nervousness

nor of grief, but of an emotion in which race instinct and true womanliness of heart were blended, and as, the circle of the room being rounded, she looked beyond into the square hallway, her eyes stopped, as if asking for courage, upon the face of the tall clock, above which a full-rigged brig had been sailing for more than a hundred years toward the harbour it never reached. At the same moment it struck the six strokes of the three-quarter hour, and the words it said sounded like "Well done! well done! well done!"

In January, though the days have begun to lengthen minute by minute, dusk begins to weave its shadows soon after four o'clock, and this fabric was blending hill and river in its impenetrable gray when Miss Keith's keen eyes, now strained with watching, saw a man on horseback coming up the second hill, while farther down, turning from the cut that connected the upper and lower roads, two vehicles could be seen moving slowly, the rockaway being in the lead, but as to their occupants, nothing was discernible.

Throwing a heavy shawl about her, Miss Keith reached the gate at the same moment as Robert Stead, who flung himself from his horse the better to answer her sudden fusillade of questions. Tatters, who had followed her to the porch, paused with one paw raised, sniffed the wind, and came no farther, in spite of the sight of his friend.

"Have they come? Does Adam look badly? Can he walk? How much help did they bring? Where are the trunks? Did they have them taken off at Stonebridge and changed to the way train for Gilead?"

Smiling in spite of himself, Stead made answer, counting on his fingers as he did so that he might check off the questions:—

"The family have all come. Mr. Lawton seems very ill and wan, but as I have not seen him for many years, I cannot speak of his looks comparatively. I do not think that he can walk; the porters carried him from the car, and his wheel-chair is lashed behind the coach. They have brought no maids. Their luggage will be at Gilead to-night, and Bisbee has agreed to deliver it in the morning. Mr. and Mrs. Lawton, with Dr. Russell, who came on with them, it seems, are in the coach, and Miss Brooke and her brother are in the rockaway. I will house Manfred for a few moments if I may, so that I may help the doctor get his patient safely indoors."

Half turning about, Stead hesitated a moment and then added hurriedly, but with much emphasis, "For God's sake get indoors, Miss West, and don't stand staring down the road like that, nor mention maids, nor ask a thousand questions before they are fairly inside the door. No one knows just how much Adam Lawton remembers or understands; but his wife and daughter are neither dumb nor blind, and both look spent."

And Miss Keith, too conscience-stricken to be angry at the rating from an almost stranger, fled in and closed the door before the rockaway came over the last hill grade, and paused, as all vehicles did, on the long plateau that reached and passed the house.

Adam junior, long, lanky, and sandy of hair and skin, got out and swung his sister to the ground. Something was bundled up under one of his arms, but head and ears alone were visible. "Grandpa Lawton all over again, Scotch hair and all! and he's brought one of those snub-nosed dogs, as I live!" ejaculated Miss Keith, from behind the curtain that screened the glass half of the door, at the same time wondering if the proper moment had arrived for hospitality. Brooke and young Adam waited for the coach to draw up before they even looked houseward, and then Dr. Russell, with serious cheerfulness, helped Mrs. Lawton, whose face Miss Keith could scarcely see for the load of pillows that she handed to her daughter. Stead and the doctor deftly bore out their burden, and Miss Keith opened the door, stepping within its shadow. So Adam Lawton came home again, surrounded by his family.

Brooke entered first, close by her father, and spying Miss Keith, there was a single moment of strained, painful silence, but only a moment, for, dropping her pillows and holding out her hand with a little smile in

which the doctor and Stead alone discerned a pathetic droop, her silver voice said, "Here I am, Cousin Keith; I've come back to my River Kingdom, and I've more than kept my promise, by bringing all the others with me;" then the tension relaxed, every one spoke, though quietly, and they carried Adam Lawton into the south parlour, where the fire burned upon the wide hearth as steadily as if it had never been extinguished in all those intervening years, and set him in the old chintz-covered chair.

Miss Keith held back in stiff reserve, and Mrs. Lawton followed, at first blindly. Then, as her eyes, focussed to the firelight, took in the details of the room in one swift glance, — bed hangings, quilt, cradle, and all, — she caught her breath and turned toward Miss Keith with arms extended, and whispered, "Ah, Cousin Keith, how did you know? — how did you think of it? They say that he may come back to himself by the long way of childhood; and how could he better do that than here in his mother's room?" And the head, with its lovely crown of silver, rested against the taller woman's bosom, and that swift touch of sympathy bound them doubly as kin.

"That's a bully fire and no fake," said the Cub, suddenly, after examining the long, thick log with the toe of his shoe; then he followed Miss Keith toward the kitchen, led both by curiosity and the smell of the supper in preparation.

"Where is that dog?" asked Miss Keith, abruptly. "I don't know what Tatters will say to him, so you had best not bring him in too sudden."

"That's what the man said," replied the Cub, cheerfully, "but your dog couldn't help liking Pam; she'd make friends with a lion."

"She. Oh, that's different," sniffed Miss Keith.

* * * * *

For the moment Dr. Russell was busy in taking Adam Lawton's pulse, and when Brooke turned to speak to Robert Stead he had silently slipped away. "Never mind, Miss Brooke," said the doctor, who read her thoughts; "Stead is a strange fellow, though a man to be trusted, but I know of no more bitter punishment to him than verbal thanks. You may need to remember this. I found out long ago that the best gratitude that any one may show him is to let him have a motive for doing something, no matter how trivial, for some one else, — lack of motive is his curse."

Then Dr. Russell also passed out into the living room, and the three were left alone.

"Mother, are you glad that we have come?" asked Brooke, going to her with that new look of complete understanding that each had worn toward the other since that fateful night when Brooke had decided.

"Glad, my daughter? I cannot say how thankful! Oh, if only I could be sure that we could stay!"

"No *ifs*, mother," said Brooke, gently, her eyes opening wider as she gazed into the fire. "You know in our new creed of work there is to be plenty of love and faith and hope, but not a single *if*. In fact, I always did think *if* a poor, leaky word, that let people escape from all sorts of nice promises; now we will simply banish it, — you and I and Adam and — father."

Lowering her eyes to the hearth-rug, she became aware of a shaggy form stretched out there—Tatters, *couchant*, with his solemn eyes fastened upon hers, watching their every movement questioningly. In answer to his appeal, Brooke knelt on the rug before him, raising him so that his paws rested on her shoulders, and whispered, "We are of your people, Tatters, and we are so tired and lonely. Won't you love us, and let us live here with you?"

Then Tatters, who had not yet moved his eyes from Brooke's, touched the tip of her nose with his tongue as lightly as the brush of a moth's wing, and dropping his head to her lap, closed his eyes, as if in sign of complete confidence.

CHAPTER X

TATTERS TRANSFERS HIMSELF

NOT even the insistent sense of responsibility and of the literal work of hands that lay before her could keep Brooke awake that first night in the homestead.

With the fact that the move was accomplished came a feeling of relief, as if a heavy weight had suddenly slipped from her shoulders, while the knowledge that Dr. Russell had elected to return there for the night after supping with Robert Stead gave her a wonderful sense of security.

In future Adam would sleep in the small room that opened between his father's and the back entry, but for this one night Miss Keith insisted upon occupying it herself, "So that you can all sleep with both eyes shut, and naught but dreams to trouble you," she insisted when Brooke, after helping wash and put away the tea things, had proposed to discuss certain domestic questions.

The combination of a jingle of sleigh bells and the whirr-r with which the hall clock cleared its throat, preparatory to striking nine, were the first sounds

that Brooke heard when she opened her eyes upon the new surroundings, and then suddenly came to herself, conscience-stricken at her utter oblivion of the past ten hours. Going to the east window, whence the sound of bells and voices came, she raised the shade and peered between the curtains. This window faced the front road, and consequently the Moosatuk, to which it was parallel, though on a much higher level; but all that could now be seen of the river was a broad roadway, smooth, white, and level, bounded on each side by rugged banks, set thick with snow-draped hemlocks.

A light snow had fallen in the early hours of the night, not a sufficient storm to drift and block the roads, but merely to "polish up the sleighing," as the country parlance has it, while its magic touch lingered on every brier and roadside weed in fantastic crystals, which, meeting the sunbeams, radiated dazzling prismatic colours.

Stopping outside the fence was Silent Stead, driving Manfred before an odd-looking low-running sled, with seat in front and box for merchandise in the rear. With him was Dr. Russell, engaged in earnest conversation, and also Tatters, who, as usual, was receiving his share of attention, as he stood paws on the edge of the seat, the expression of his face, ears, and tail seeming to vary according to the conversation of the men.

Brooke stood there spellbound, the muslin draperies held together beneath her chin like a garment, and, as she looked, the Cub came up the lane road from the barn, carrying the beloved Pam held high on one shoulder. At sight of Tatters, the pup struggled to free herself, and began to bark wildly. Stead evidently said something to the Cub, for, lowering Pam to the sleigh box, he stood back, and watched Tatters walk about the box at a little distance, his tail stiffly erect, and the neck ruff that belonged to the collie half of him bristling also. As he drew nearer, Pam leaned forward on her outstretched paws, barked saucily, and before the dignified old dog could think of a suitable reply, outflanked him by giving him an enthusiastic lick on the nose, as he drew near. Next, casting herself recklessly from the sleigh, she slid along sidewise, landing on her back almost between his front feet, with her paws held up, as if in sign of complete submission. Then, as the men laughed heartily at these tactful feminine antics in a puppy of only six months, Pam began running to and fro in the snow, making believe to eat large mouthfuls of it, and kicking it into the air. For a moment Tatters hesitated, and then bounded awkwardly after the pup as fast as his stiff hind leg would let him. To and fro they ran in the ecstasy of puppy play until Miss Keith, shawl over head, came out in amazement at the turn of things, and

Tatters, quite spent with his unusual exercise, lay panting in the snow, Pam following suit. For there is one inflexible dog rule — that as soon as a new-comer has received recognition, he must yield obedience to the dog already in command; that is dog law. Thus it was that young life came to Tatters with the new arrivals, even as it had come to the homestead itself.

As Miss Keith returned to the house, she glanced up at Brooke's window, and, seeing the face between the curtains, she nodded and waved her hand gayly, a totally different attitude from that with which a week or even a day before she would have greeted any one who had stayed abed until nine in the morning. Instantly Brooke turned to her dressing, and though at first the very cold water made her gasp, the after glow more than made up for it.

Brooke could not conceal her satisfaction at the fact that some breakfast had been stored away for her in the "hot closet," and the mere fact placated Miss Keith more than a thousand apologies for oversleeping. Why is it that people, women especially, feel it a special point of virtue to suppress or deny the existence of natural appetites that to be truly without would prove them abnormal?

When both Mrs. Lawton and Brooke had duly learned where every dish, pot, and pan belonged, and

had seen the empty closet with its shelves edged with scalloped paper that had been prepared for the china they had brought, — one complete set, a Christmas present from Mr. Dean a few years before, having been retained, — Mrs. Lawton returned to her husband, and Brooke cornered Miss Keith for the necessary business conversation which, though inevitable, the older woman for some reason was seemingly trying to avoid.

“In a minute I’ll be there, and we’ll have it all out,” she said, rushing out the back door toward the chicken houses with a dish-pan of scraps that she had deftly made into a sort of stew, while she talked, by the addition of some corn meal, red pepper, and hot water, returning in a very few minutes with the empty receptacle.

“That reminds me, Brooke, it’s best the next three months to feed them their hot meal in the morning, and not to let them out to exercise before eleven, and shut them up tight, sharp at three, even on clear days. If you don’t, they get so cold it sort of discourages the eggs at the time you most want them. I’ve made out a list of my steady customers, and put it here in the drawer along with the farm book, in case you have enough eggs to peddle, and mind! forty cents a dozen is my steady price from December to March. Don’t let ’em cheat you. After March you must follow

market rates. The farm book tells just what I plant, and when, and what I naturally expect to get back. You see the place has run itself fairly well, hired man and all, though you won't expect it to now, because you'll need eggs to eat, and pretty much all the milk and butter output, while your father's on slop food.

"If you'll take my advice, you'll tend the fowls yourself, and don't trust the hired help. And I don't think you'd best start the incubator this year, — you'll have enough on your hands. There are eight or ten hens that have been working overtime this winter, so I expect they will be thankful to rest their legs, and set the first week in March. By the way, there's spring latches on the doors of the roosting and laying houses, — my idea to trap light-fingered folk if they get in, and to keep the fowls from straying. Best be careful not to get shut in without the keys (they lie in the box by the clock with all the others, plainly labelled). What money there is to be had from poultry in these parts comes from caring for it yourself, and you can't trust hired female help, 'specially when it comes from the city."

"But, Cousin Keith," said Brooke, as soon as she could be heard, and struggling not to laugh at the outpouring of words, which, when the farm was the topic, she soon found flowed as steadily as Niagara, "I do not expect to keep female help from the city."

"Oh, you relied on getting them from about here, then? Well, I'm afraid you'll find it a scant market, unless you'll put up with coloured; the American girls won't live out in families where they set them at separate tables, and I don't blame them. There's old Mrs. Peck, she sometimes accommodates for a month or so, as a working housekeeper in confinement cases, but she is old-fashioned New England and wouldn't take to city ways. Why, she would think her soul lost if she used prepared flour for her buckwheat cakes instead of setting them with yeast, and she sticks to soda and cream of tartar, which she understands the workings of, for all baking, as she claims that baking powder isn't plain and above board and so is to be avoided, though I must say her tea biscuits took the prize over mine at the Gordon fair."

Once again Brooke shook her head, this time not trying to suppress her laughter, — "I have no intention of keeping any household help whatsoever," she managed to say at last.

Miss Keith stopped short with a gasp, as if a pail of ice-water had been poured upon her head, and then said: "No hired help! then who is to do the cooking, and what will you eat? If this was Stonebridge, you could get table board at the Inn, though it is expensive, and the people that often stop here

in driving, to buy my fresh cake, complain that it isn't satisfactory."

"Cousin Keith, you must take me seriously. I do not think you understood the letter that I wrote, telling you we were coming here. *I* am going to do the work; fifty dollars a month is our present income, and I do not mean to touch the little principal we have, but keep it in case of accident, — at least until I am in working order and have devised some plan for earning more. All I hope to do is to get some good woman, like your Mrs. Peck, to come here for a few weeks and teach me how to cook plain food and be economical, for it is the other part that I understand, and learned at Lucy Dean's cooking class, to make cake, and candy, and all the little supper dishes in a chafing-dish. Adam has already promised that he will make the fires and do the heavy things, so you see I'm not so badly off after all. You mustn't look so discouragingly at me, Cousin Keith. You see the only way for us to earn money in the very beginning is by not spending it."

Instantly Keith West's whole attitude changed. She not only ceased making objections, but the distance that she herself had, in her imagination, forced to be kept between herself and her kin disappeared, and practical suggestions took the place of obstruction.

"That minute you spoke and looked just like your

Grandma West, when the outlying members of the family tried to argue her into giving up, and going down to winter at Gilead, after grandpa died. Gentle, but set as fast as bricks in Portland cement. Of course you can do the work for a while anyway (I did the same, and more too, at your age), if you can only get the knack of turning it off, and I don't know of any one more likely to help you out than Mrs. Peck. That is, unless I postpone my going for a couple of weeks, and do it myself," and Miss Keith paused with an eager look that said she would ask nothing better; for the advent of the family, instead of making her feel out of place, had already made her reasons for the change grow vague and hazy, and the departure itself seemed not an escape, but more like an eviction.

"You are very kind to offer, but that is impossible, you know," answered Brooke. "In the last letter you wrote me, regretting the delay, you said that you must *absolutely* leave on the 12th, and that will be to-morrow. It is better too that we should begin at once before Adam and I grow lazy from seeing you take the lead and being accustomed to our liberty. How much does Mrs. Peck charge, and where does she live? I think I had best go to see her to-day while you are here to be with mother."

Thus Miss Keith, by no act but her own, had literally closed the door upon herself, which fact she was

clear-sighted enough to recognize, and bore herself accordingly, making haste to reply: "Mrs. Peck has six dollars a week when she cares for mother, child, and the house, but when it is just 'accommodating' with a grown girl to help out and take steps, she has three, and must be called for and returned home. She would jump at the chance to come here for three dollars, for there have been next to no births this winter, and she has either been at home most of the time, or else at her daughter's, where she is kept busy and, of course, gets no pay. She is very intimate with Mrs. Enoch Fenton, who lives just round the turn on the Windy Hill road, not half a mile from here. You can go up there for a walk after dinner, as I suppose you'd rather settle your own business. No, you can't go this morning, no one disturbs Mrs. Fenton before dinner; you see, situated as she is, she must have all the forenoon uninterrupted for her work — she manages wonderfully, but if any one comes in before it is done, it upsets her for the day. Why, the neighbours would no more think of calling on Mrs. Fenton in the morning than they would of visiting the minister on Saturday night!"

Brooke was about to ask how this particular woman was differently circumstanced from her neighbours, when Miss Keith again took up the domestic thread:—

"There's hay and straw and corn fodder enough

to last over until pasture is growing again. I'd advise you to sell the two old cows, the two young ones (one calves in April, the other in September) will be enough for you to manage. *Of course* you'll keep Billy; you'd be stuck fast here on the hill like moss on a rock but for him. There's no earthly reason why Adam can't learn to curry him, and milk too after a spell; but Larsen is engaged until April, when he expects to be married, and work on one of the great estates in Gordon. He works for me three hours a day in winter, just the milking and chores morning and night. I pay him ten dollars a month; the Fentons keep him the rest of the time, and pay him fifteen dollars and board, for, of course, I couldn't board a man here!"

Brooke did not appreciate the exact reason, but did not say so, and Miss Keith continued: "After the 1st of April, Adam ought to be well broken in, and you can doubtless get a man to plot out the garden, and work the corn lot, the potato, hay, and rye fields on shares. I'll speak to Mr. Bisbee and the blacksmith about that before I go, and tell them to keep their eyes open for one."

"Don't you think that three dollars a week is very small pay for a woman such as Mrs. Peck appears to be, from what you say?" said Brooke, unthinkingly, her old habits of generosity being yet strong upon her.

“Brooke Lawton, if you are going to bring your ideas of city wages and charitable reforms up here, you’ll make trouble for others, as well as for yourself,” snapped Miss Keith, vehemently. “That is her price, set by herself, and you can’t afford to change it for one thing (you’re good to eat on your principal these first three months anyhow); and suppose you could, what good would it do her, but make her discontented with what others could pay, and humble them? People ought to hesitate before they upset the wages of a place they come into new. Half such charity is selfish gratification, to my thinking. There was old John Selleck; he used to do little garden chores for fifty cents a day and food, — light work with frequent resting spells. Along comes a city man and hires a cottage on the lower road for two months. Said it was a shame to ‘underpay the labourer,’ gives him a dollar and a half a day. When the two months were over, and he left again, would John Selleck chore about for fifty cents a day and food? Not he, so, as nobody would pay him more, and he wouldn’t work for less, he nearly starved last autumn, and now he’s working on the town farm for board without the fifty cents!”

It put matters in a different light to Brooke, and she was about to say so when Dr. Russell thrust his head in at the door, and, catching only a few words of Miss

Keith's oration on local political economy, judged that Brooke was being unduly lectured, and would welcome release, which he hastened to offer, by asking her to wrap up well and take a survey of her property with him, saying that Adam had driven down to Gilead with Stead, who had offered to show him the rounds of post-office, store, and blacksmith's shop.

As Dr. Russell opened the front door for Brooke to pass out, Tatters, who for the past hour had been lying by Adam Lawton's chair in the sitting room, now rose, stretched himself, and prepared to follow, while as he did so, Mrs. Lawton saw that her husband's eyes followed the dog with an expression very similar to the one that he had worn the last week when either she or Brooke came into plain view. By thus reading his expression, and by it guessing of his needs, she had already established a certain means of communication, which Dr. Russell had explained to her she might hope to develop day by day to the point when continuous memory and coherent speech should return.

Once outside the door, Tatters sniffed at Brooke's cloak, touched the fingers of her ungloved hand lightly with his tongue, and then fell behind, following her at a measured distance, pausing when she paused, and straightway marching along as soon as she did.

"It appears to me," said Dr. Russell, smiling, as he

watched the old dog's soldier-like tread, "that Tatters has 'transferred himself' pretty thoroughly, and Miss Keith will therefore have her last objection to going to Boston removed."

A path was shovelled from the front gate to the side lane above the house, into which it turned, passing barn, cow, and chicken houses.

"How well our forebears knew how to build for winter convenience," said the doctor, tucking Brooke's hand under his arm, as they walked, for there was a layer of treacherous ice under the new snow. "Nowadays a landscape architect would put all these out-buildings out of sight below the slope, or else up behind that knot of cedars, where it would take a day's work to dig a road in snow time, while here all you have to do is to look out the kitchen window, and see that all is safe and sound. It is a compact little home, dear child, and in view of my practical knowledge, as well as of the sentimental value of such things, I believe that under any circumstances it is the best and most possible life for you all for many years to come; only remember, do not be discouraged if you have some blue days before the spring sun shines. There is a trite old saying, 'Who loves the land in February loves for life.' Simply keep working and do not try to look too far ahead; even the Bearer of the World's Burden would only have us cope with evil day by day. There

is where we often make our error — by cutting off the vista to the good with the shadow of borrowed trouble.”

Brooke looked up at him gratefully, and hesitated a moment before she said: “There is only one thing about which I am troubling a little, and that is Adam. How will dropping everything in the shape of books, and turning into my assistant farmer, much as he likes the idea, affect his future? You may not know how backward he is even now, and,” smiling archly, “I’m afraid he’ll have to work for his board this first year before I can even afford him an immigrant’s wages.”

“I’m glad that you have come straight to this point,” said Dr. Russell, “for it is one where I can meet you halfway. I had a talk with your brother on the train yesterday, and I am convinced that the practical, and not the scholastic, is his forte. When he goes to college it should be to the scientific, not to the academic school; that part of his culture must come from good reading. His first need is out-of-door air and life — so far, so good, that he can have. Last night at supper I discussed this with Robert Stead, as his early training was both at the School of Mines and the Polytechnic of Troy. The upshot,—‘Let him come to me every day,’ said Stead, ‘for as many hours as he can spare, more or less, and I will see what he lacks, and perhaps stimulate him by companionship in study, or at any rate we can

fight out the essentials together. Perhaps it will warm my brain again, doctor, who knows?"

Brooke clasped her hands with an expression of delight, and then dropped them, saying, "But we cannot pay for such a favour as that would be, and on the other hand we couldn't put ourselves under an obligation."

"My child," said the doctor, stopping in the middle of the cow-house, which they chanced to be investigating at the moment, and leaning against a stall, while the gentle occupant pulled at his coat with her inquisitive tongue, "there is another way in which we all make grave mistakes. God forbid that I should advocate the shirking or casting of responsibility upon others, but there is another extreme that we are falling into in this twentieth century — an eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth breed of independence, while the brotherhood that should blend and sweeten all our daily actions is treated as a vocation, a thing set apart, and labelled 'Charity' or 'Social Service.' It seems to me that the Christian law of silent burden-bearing is far finer and more subtle than this, in that it leaves no obligation in its wake.

"If Robert Stead, the man cursed with lack of motive, finds a fragment of impulse in the stimulation of awakening his buried knowledge and in contact with your brother, when your brother needs this knowledge,

where lies the obligation? No, the scales are evenly balanced; accept the result, and do not draw a breath to jar the adjustment. Moreover, do not judge Stead by the usual social standards, but bear with him. Perhaps at times he may even seem discourteous, for what he thinks he suffered by one woman, and a most remarkable one she was too, has made him curt with all; for his great failing is that he can never judge except by the personal measure, and unconsciously he has made a cult of selfishness."

"I understand, oh, now I understand; how can I ever thank you for showing me the way? Do you know, Dr. Russell," Brooke said, clasping her hands on his arm, "it seems to me I never began really to live until the day that trouble came to us;" — while as Brooke spoke, the silent hour in the Parks's gallery, and Marte Lorenz' picture, stretched themselves as the inseparable background to all that had followed, and deepened the colour in her cheeks, that were already glowing with the keen air.

* * * * *

When Brooke and the Doctor finished their tour, and were returning to the house, Tatters still following solemnly, Bisbee's double-runner sled with the baggage was seen coming from the lower road, while Stead's cutter turned into the yard from the hill way. The Cub being in a very happy frame of mind as the result of his morning's trip.

"Only think, Sis!" he cried, as soon as he was within speaking distance, "the blacksmith has a registered dog bull pup, with just as good a pedigree as Pam's — a son of imported Black-eye who is owned over in Gordon. He's got a pedigree a mile long all written out, but it's smudged and mussy, and the blacksmith has offered me a dollar to copy it out on a fan-shaped paper like mine. That will just come in handy to pay Pam's tax, too; it's due up here the 1st of January. Then you see next year we'll go in partnership, and raise some pups, and fifty dollars apiece is the very least we can get for them, and maybe a hundred for the dogs, if they're clever!"

The elder men smiled at each other, and the doctor said to Silent Stead, "Enthusiasm is an element that can be ill spared from *materia medica*, — it will do you good even to get a whiff of it." To Brooke: "Good-by for now, my child; your father will have all that can be done for him. A sloping platform from the kitchen door will allow him to be wheeled out in pleasant weather, and time and care alone will show the result. Remember, do not hesitate to send for me if you are puzzled — and courage! the courage that is always given to the world's workers at their need," and the good physician, the spiritual son of St. Luke of old, took his place by Stead, who turned Manfred in the direction of the Gilead station.

Meanwhile Tatters had disappeared, and when Brooke went indoors again, realizing too late that she had not yet thanked Silent Stead, she found the dog stretched by her father's chair, an indoor post he thereafter occupied.

* * * * *

A little after two o'clock Brooke set out for Mrs. Fenton's, leaving her mother to superintend the unpacking of the simpler things, clothes, books, and the little table furniture that they had deemed best to save from the wreck and bring with them, a task in which Miss Keith seemed to revel so unfeignedly that Brooke began her walk with an unusual sense of freedom.

She had gone only a few hundred yards when she remembered Tatters, and, turning back to get him, found that he was already close behind, and hurrying as if life or death depended upon his escort. "How did you know I was coming? How did you get out?" she asked him, and then laughed at herself for expecting a reply other than the short, joyous bark he gave, as he circled around her, pawing up the snow, inviting her to play with clumsy, stiff gestures that plainly said, "I know I am rather an old fellow for this sort of thing, but I'm willing to do anything I can to amuse you," while he even raced after the snowballs she threw at random, and rashly tried to retrieve one, dropping it hastily at her feet with a comical expression,

showing by a twist of his jaw and rubbing his nose between his paws that it was too cold for his teeth.

The walk was up an almost straight hill, relieved by occasional resting-places by which alone travel in such a country is made possible to man or beast, so that when Brooke reached the gate of the Fenton house she paused, both for breath and to get her bearings. No pathway had been shovelled to the front door, and the beaten track led round the side of the house to a wide porch at the south, which also held a well-house in its shelter, and this Brooke followed.

Her knock at the door was followed by a rumbling sound from within, which began in an opposite corner of the house, and drew rapidly nearer; then the door opened outward, singularly enough, and just inside it sat a little old lady in a wheel-chair that she both guided and propelled with her own hands.

"I'm so sorry to have troubled you," Brooke began. "I wished to see Mrs. Enoch Fenton, and Miss Keith said that it was the first house before the cross-roads, but I must have misunderstood."

"And so it is, dear. I'm Mrs. Fenton." Then, as she read Brooke's puzzled expression: "Oh, I see, Keith didn't tell you that I use wheels instead of feet. Come right in; see, Tatters is quite at home here, and he knows where my cooky drawer is just as well as any child in the neighbourhood," and, jerking a

strap that she held in her hand, which was also fastened to the door handle, she closed it behind her guest even before Brooke realized and apologized for not doing it herself.

Quick as a flash the chair was turned, and travelled across the square hall, which also served as a summer sitting room, into a kitchen, cheerful and neat as wax, while as Brooke followed, her senses now keyed to the unusual, she noticed that not only had the doorways been widened, but that all the furniture, tables, dresser, chest of drawers, and even the stove itself were below the usual level.

"Choose a chair," said Mrs. Fenton, smiling brightly as she brought herself to a stop close to the sunny southwest bay window, where a wide shelf with a deep ledge, containing sewing materials and various garments in process of manufacture, showed it to be her habitual nook.

As Brooke drew a splint-bottomed rocker nearer to her hostess, she noticed that, though the white hair and thin face had at first given the impression of greater age, Mrs. Fenton was not more than sixty-five, while the intelligence of her expression and brightness of eye might well belong to a woman of fifty, and although her lower limbs seemed small and were wrapped in a shawl, her arms and chest were full and muscular.

"You don't tell me your name, but I make it that you are Adam Lawton's daughter, whom Keith has been expecting and worrying about these ten days past. She told me about your father's money loss and shock, and how he was coming back home; and I've been real interested to hear, because you see, dearie, Adam and I went to school together fifty odd years ago, and to the day he left we were always a tie in spelling matches, and now here we are again, like as not matched together as cripples. Tell me all about him, dear, if it don't hurt you. I've found, these eight years since I've had my discipline, that exchanging experiences with others likely situated is apt to make one credit a lot of things to the mercy side of the record that would never have been set down, if we hadn't been brought face to face with other folks' misery, and so forced to take count of stock, so to speak. And please, before we begin and have a comfortable chat, give Tatters a sugar cooky out of the drawer there (I never before set eyes on a dog so fond of sweet cake, — his mouth is fairly watering), — no, not that little drawer, the peppermints and maple candy are in there, though you might like a bit of that to nibble on, — the second drawer;" and Brooke, after giving the expectant dog his cake, drew still closer to the wheel-chair, and, such was the spell of single-hearted sympathy, quite as a matter of course she told Mrs.

Fenton, naturally and frankly, of both her hopes and fears, ending with her desire to get Mrs. Peck to "accommodate" until she should have learned to manage alone.

"You dear child!" exclaimed the lame woman, laying her work-hardened hand on Brooke's soft, shapely one as she ended, and looking at her through the reminiscent tears that would gather on her lashes, "I take it a special thought of Providence, your coming to me, for who has had to learn, more than I, how to keep housework in hand? — and as to Mrs. Peck, she will be here to-night, as Enoch, being Deacon, must sleep over at Gordon, where the Con-Association meets.

"Listen, and I'll tell you of my trouble quickly as may be, because what's over and gone best not be dug too deep, except for the planting of future seeds of grace. Eight years ago this winter I was down at my daughter's house in Gilead (she being the only one of six left me outside God's Acre), tending her first-born. All around the well was laid with great cobbles, I slipped, and having a heavy pail in hand could not save myself, and hurt my spine, and it paralyzed my legs.

"They brought me home, and weeks and months went by. Enoch had the best doctors that summer over from Gordon, but nothing could be done to liven me; and then I knew that I must lie there bed-ridden.

den, or be propped in a sick-chair for life, and leave my work undone for others. Oh, it was bitter, and I sorely rebelled to see a hired woman in my place, and father only half cared for. Then came fall of the year, and one day father brought in Doctor Russell, who had come up to stop on Windy Hill with Robert Stead for the shooting. He asked father to go away and leave him alone with me. Then he looked me over, bent all my joints that would bend, and, after listening to my heart, sat in the big chair by the bed (I can see him now just as plain), and said: 'What troubles you the most, Mrs. Fenton? What is your worst suffering, and what do you most wish?'

"'To do something, to get to work, and not lie dead in the midst of life.' He sat quite still for ten minutes or more, matching his finger-tips together in thought, and then he said, 'If you have will enough, and courage, as I believe, we'll have you downstairs and back at work again within a year.' Then he told me of the chair, and how I could be fastened in it to keep from falling, and learn to use the wheels for legs, as a child does how to walk. Bless him! it all came true. At first, to be sure, I was afraid, and banged about, and my arms were tired to aching, and I often cried. But Enoch took such comfort, seeing me at table even, that it was a nerve tonic. And gradually, as I strengthened, he had the doors widened, and the sills done

away with, and everything set within my reach, until, when the year was up and a little more, I turned off all my work except the washing, and cooked the dinner for the doctor the next time he chanced in.

“When the weather is seasonable, too, I get all about the yard, and now I really feel ambitious to go down to see your father when the roads are settled. You see it was a special Providence that I hit my back just the spot I did, for if it had been higher up, or on my head, it might have paralyzed my arms. Yes, there’s always something to the mercy side, if we only stop to reckon up.”

The sun was setting when Brooke left Mrs. Fenton, for she had been there for two hours. The southwestern sky was all aglow as the sun broke its way through the dusky clouds of falling night, and like it, the heart of the young woman glowed within her breast. Free of health and of limb, what might she not will and do, ah, if only she could become, even as that woman in the wheel-chair, one of the world’s workers!

As she walked swiftly down the road, the long shafts of light and the wind gusts also, sinking to rest, played with her hair; and at the turn she met Silent Stead, who was returning from Gilead. Thinking the opportunity had come to recognize his kindness, she stopped, half turning to the roadway; but he, either through offishness or suspecting her design, passed on with a mere greeting.

Not piqued, because she remembered Dr. Russell's warning, Brooke went her way, smiling to herself in amusement ; and when she neared the farm she broke into a run, Tatters barking and gambolling about her, so that Miss Keith, who came to the door at the sound, was forced to confess, though much against her will, that, in spite of his years of service to herself, Tatters had " transferred himself."

Meanwhile, by a strange perversity of fate, the radiant face of the girl whom Robert Stead had passed by so curtly on the road, turned homeward with him, all unbidden, now smiling at him from between Manfred's mobile ears, sitting opposite him at his table, and even permeating the smoke wreaths from his pipe that coiled, as in a vision, around her head in fantastic tresses.

CHAPTER XI

BREAD

THREE weeks had now passed since Miss Keith's departure, and the daily toil of each had been punctuated by a series of unexpected events.

Much as Brooke had dreaded the going of her executive kinswoman, it was in a sense a relief. She was well aware that until she was entirely thrown upon her own resources it would be impossible to judge her strength or plan definitely for the future; and now that the move had been made, this planning was the next hill to climb. It was impossible for Brooke to have a quiet moment, except when she was alone in her room at night, so long as Miss Keith was in the house; for the estimable woman was continually remembering some important bit of advice, relative to the year's rotation of work in the garden or the "putting up" of the fruit. One of the last details that she impressed upon Brooke in showing her baskets of various bulbs and a large store of the seeds of sweet peas, nasturtiums, and other hardy annual flowers, all neatly put up in paper bags, was to sow plenty of them in long rows like vege-

tables, because as she said "the rich folks were always stopping to see the view as they drove from Stonebridge to Gordon, and often sent in and begged to buy the old-fashioned flowers, because their gardens had not room for them."

Brooke promised, but the matter passed quickly from her overcrowded mind; for, interpreted by Miss Keith, the work of the mistress of the West homestead would have kept at least six Plymouth-Rock-ribbed housewives at work from rise until set of sun. Very different indeed was it from Mrs. Enoch Fenton's soothing advice, "Dearie, just begin by doing what you must, and let the rest sort of slip off your hands until the Lord gives 'em the knack to handle it."

When the rockaway, driven by Larsen, at last came to the door with the Cub as honorary footman to see Miss Keith off and make sure that none of her twelve pieces of wonderfully assorted baggage went astray, she broke down completely, yet did not seem comforted or pleased with Brooke's invitation to return if she changed her mind about matrimony, the final sniff that followed the sincere and cordial offer being more of scorn than of grief.

Mrs. Lawton was now fast shaking off the state of being in a waking dream, in which she lived since the night of the calamity; and, once Miss Keith had gone, both mother and daughter began to taste the quiet joys

of a companionship that the forced separation of the last few years of conventional city life had not only left undeveloped but unknown.

Their intercourse was none the less sustaining because the things that they discussed were the bread-and-butter affairs of every day — whether the invalid should have chicken or mutton broth, and as to whether it was possible to make many of the dishes they desired with only half the ingredients the cook-book demanded, Mrs. Lawton's experience of long ago and Brooke's common sense deciding in the affirmative.

In fact, the young mistress had not been working side by side with Mrs. Peck (who came to "accommodate" and instruct the day after Miss Keith left) a week before she was sure of what she had always suspected, that fully three-quarters of modern recipes for cooking are merely competitive struggles to see how much good material can be crammed into something totally unsuitable for the human stomach.

Gradually, as the first week drew to a close, it happened that, after the Cub and Brooke had helped establish their father in his wheel-chair for the day, Mrs. Lawton went to and fro about the lower floor, dusting, adjusting, wiping dishes, watering the plants, and doing the thousand and one little things that make a woman a part of her home. Then later in the day she would wheel Adam Lawton into the kitchen per-

haps, and, taking out her work-basket, do some of the sewing that was imperative to make the garments of the past even possible for present use. As to Adam Lawton himself, he was more alert and did not seem to doze as constantly as before, while his eyes wandered from object to object with a changeful expression unlike the apathy of his first conscious period.

Before the seven days were completely rounded, three things had happened. Brooke heard her mother hum a snatch of the ballad "Jock o' Hazeldean," as she snipped withered leaves from the plants in the kitchen window; she saw her father stroke Tatters' head and finger his ears with his well hand; and Robert Stead, who now left their mail as he returned with his own from the village every morning, brought her, together with some belated foreign New Year's cards, a flat, square package, spattered with foreign postmarks, addressed in an unknown hand, in care of Charlie Ashton, and evidently remailed by him.

In a perfectly unobtrusive and matter-of-course way, without so much as by your leave, the silent man had established a more or less silent intercourse with the Lawton family as a whole. He must pass the house on his daily horseback trip to the village, and the fact that he brought their morning mail or did a bit of marketing was a courtesy that could not be construed into an obligation, and the lending of a magazine,

novel, or gardening book soon came to be a matter of course.

Mrs. Lawton could not but welcome one of her own kind who belonged as remotely to a certain past as she herself. Brooke, remembering Dr. Russell's words, greeted him cordially, glad to give cheer to one so lonely, and added to this motive, be it said, was the general interest which a man of fifty, who is in any way surrounded by a tragedy or mystery, excites in a young, warm-hearted woman; while the Cub fairly adored his tutor to be, afar off, for had not Stead a taste for horses, dogs, guns, fishing tackle, and, above all, liberty? Also, had he not offered to make easy the torturing pathway of mathematics? — while best of all from the first he had treated the youth of the difficult age, which is both aggressive and sensitive, like a fellow-man, younger, of course, but still an equal, instead of a cross between a fool, a nuisance, and a criminal, as some of his instructors had chosen to regard him.

When Brooke had taken the little package from Stead's hand, in spite of the unfamiliarity of the writing upon it, a sudden embarrassment seized upon her, making her redden to the temples; and, instead of considering and opening it as one of the many cards of Christmas greeting that she had received from fellow-students and friends ever since her Paris year, she laid it aside and presently carried it to her room.

Closing the door, though it was very seldom that even her mother came to the second floor, Brooke turned the thick envelope over several times before cutting the heavy cord that bound it, and so swift and sure is the speech of telepathy that she did not wonder who had written to her in care of Carolus Ashton. She did not try to trace the identity of unfamiliar characters or remember that in the years that separated her from that time no similar letter had reached her; she simply knew that the address had been traced by the pen of Marte Lorenz, without for a moment realizing that the source of this clairvoyance lay in the undeniable craving of her whole being to know of him. Once opened, a double sheet of blank paper enclosed a square of artists' board covered with light tissue. Tearing this off, with eager trembling fingers, instead of the man's face that she had expected to look out at her, with those wide-open eyes from under the tumbled thatch of hair, instead of the mustache-veiled lips which told simple truths with such sympathetic sincerity that it made them more desirable than praise, she saw herself, or rather one of herself, for it is only a strangely monotonous, colourless type of woman who can be interpreted by merely the universal blending of composites.

It was simply a head, small, perforce, and lightly sketched in oil, with only enough of the shoulder curve, over which the face was turned, to give a balance, the

sombre background of deep browns serving to throw out the golden glints of the hair; but the quality that struck Brooke at once was the same strange effect of lighting that had puzzled her in the picture of Eucharistia. Without being in the form of the conventional halo of the old masters, a raying light emanated from behind the head, and the eyes seemed as if they were but the opening to a vision beyond.

Still hoping for some message or word, Brooke, holding the picture close, saw in one corner, half hidden by a bit of drapery, the initials "M. L." and the words "For the New Year."

Then Brooke, the girl of sentiment and idealized emotions, argued with Miss Lawton, the head of the family, the young woman of responsibilities and practicalities.

Brooke said, "Why did he send me my picture instead of his own?"

Miss Lawton answered, "Perhaps it is not intended for a portrait at all, but merely a chance resemblance in a New Year's token, such as an artist may send to a dozen friends!"

"But," queried Brooke, not listening, but following her desire, "he may have meant by sending my portrait that he wished to tell me that he still thought of me, and a girl always likes to have her picture painted; but if he had sent his own it would be like intruding him-

self upon me, if I had forgotten. How shall I thank him?"

"It is evident, as he sent no address, he particularly desires not to be thanked," replied Miss Lawton, somewhat tartly.

"If he trusted his letter to Carolus Ashton, probably hearing of him through some mutual artist friend, why should not I do likewise, who have known him as Lucy's cousin all my life?" persisted Brooke.

"And have him get up one of his fabulous tales about a mysterious correspondence and tantalize Lucy with it until she turns about and extracts the scant truth from him?" sneered Miss Lawton.

Without deigning further reply, Brooke went to the little table by the window, where stood an inkstand, in the drawer of which were some loose sheets of paper and envelopes. Picking up one of the latter, she addressed it in her usual hand, stamped it, and then, resting it on the window ledge, drew a sheet of paper toward her and straightway fell into a brown study, during which either her brain refused to think or her hand to write. Then, suddenly starting up, she crossed to her bureau and, taking up the little picture of Eucharistia, gazed at it steadily, slipped it from the delicate silver frame, and with a sigh, half of regret, wrapped it in a sheet of note-paper and sealed it in the addressed envelope.

Putting the wordless letter in the pocket of the short

working apron she wore, Brooke went to the letter-box that stood at the junction of main road and lane leading to the barn, and dropped it in, that the carrier might find it that afternoon on his daily trip.

Returning by way of the kitchen, the loaves of bread that Brooke had that morning kneaded, moulded, and covered for their final raising met her eye. At first, smiling at the sudden change of motive, she examined them seriously, for in reality these loaves were of no small importance, representing as they did the girl's first independent baking.

Opening the oven doors, she tested floor and side, adjusted dampers after Mrs. Peck's custom, and then, shutting the loaves from sight, went away, feeling very much as if she had imprisoned some living thing in a fiery furnace, so much depended upon the outcome of the first venture.

An hour later Mrs. Peck, returning from a neighbourly call upon Mrs. Fenton, surprised Brooke in the act of taking the four freshly baked loaves from their pans. They were done to a nicety of golden brown, and she laid each one down carefully and paused a moment, sniffing the appetizing odour before covering them with a clean towel, lest too sudden cooling should make the crust seam.

"Tired, bean't you!" ejaculated Mrs. Peck, whose principal comfort in the present was to lament and be-

wail a past of fabulous grandeur upon the like of which no living contemporary had ever set eyes. "I suppose you are thinking how little wunst you ever expected to hev to set to riz and knead and bake your own bread. Poor dear, I kin feel for you! I've been through it all — it's turrible to feel yoursel' downsot like I was after Mr. Peck died, and not through your own deserts!"

Brooke, who knew the good woman's pet infirmity, hardly listened to her; there was another theme that filled her brain, almost shaping itself to rhythm, not of the past alone, but the present, the future — of all time, as old as life itself, the unending song of the man who sows, of the grain in the field that endures the winter and leaps upward, spears aloft, militant, at the bugle of spring; of the grain in the ear, of the molten gold of the harvest that goes to the mill, of the clear white flour that the man's mate blends with the magic leaven to be bread for the house. And her heart took wing as she looked at the loaves, for if the weal of the land rests on the farmer's plough, second only should stand the toil of the maker of bread.

There were only four loaves, it is true, but to Brooke they stood for a definite power — her first direct productive work.

Choosing one from the rest and half wrapping it in a white towel, she carried it to her mother, who was sitting beside her father, whose chair was placed close

by the sunny window. For the two days past his lips had moved, though inarticulately, and his wife was doubly on the alert for a single spoken word.

Holding the loaf before her as if it had been a trophy, Brooke crossed the room and, folding back the towel, the steaming odour of the bread reached her mother's nostrils. Then she held out her hands to her daughter, taking the bread from her almost reverently.

"Watch father!" whispered Brooke.

There was a look of recognition struggling with other visions in his eyes, and strange incoherent sounds were formed on the struggling lips. His eyes fixed themselves on the loaf, which his wife held close. His nostrils quivered as if in unison with his other awakening senses. Brooke knelt by his chair, endeavouring to read sense in the vague sounds he uttered. There came a pause, a hush, and then, in hoarse, uncertain accents, unmistakable yet feeble at the close, Adam Lawton whispered two words, "New bread."

Meanwhile, outside in the kitchen, warming himself by the stove, was the Cub, who, coming in from the cold and the exertion of rounding up refractory chickens after their morning sunning, had brought a keen appetite with him. Snatching a knife that lay on the table, he cut a thick crust from one of the loaves; this he hastened to spread with molasses from a jug in the pantry, and then stood with his back to the fire, taking great

round bites with the wholesome gusto of six, instead of his old-time critical mouthing of surfeited dyspeptic discontent.

* * * * *

The surprise of the second week was a visit from Lucy Dean at its close. The excellent sleighing had filled many houses of both Stonebridge and Gordon for the week end, and shortly before noon of Saturday Brooke was sitting at the old desk in the living room, for which her added books had earned the name of library, writing her weekly letter to Lucy, when a shadow darkened the nearest window, and, looking up, she saw Lucy in the flesh, peering in at her with a serio-comic expression that Brooke knew of old to mean deep, real feeling. Bells had been jingling by the whole morning, so that those that had heralded her coming had passed unnoticed.

In an instant Brooke was at the door, and no one who saw the silent but emphatic meeting could ever after deny the possible existence of real friendship between women.

"Where did you drop from?"

"The Hendersons' sleigh! I'm up there for Sunday simply because you haven't asked me here yet!"

"Oh, Lucy, everything has been so unsettled and uncertain I really didn't even think of it."

"Of course not; now don't begin to worry, it's only

my brutal way of letting you know that I simply had to see you, and have not in the least increased my admiration for the country in the winter, or the Hendersons in particular!"

"You will stay to dinner, surely? Or are they waiting outside?" cried Brooke, in a sudden panic at the thought of being brought thus face to face with some of their ultrafashionable friends.

"No, my lamb, they have gone over for luncheon to the Parks's at Gordon (you don't know, of course, that the frisky Senator has just bought the Smythers' big estate, — furniture, servants, and all, — in order to carry still farther the success of the New York housewarming). I begged off for the day, and, as the party was one man shy, they gratefully gave me my liberty, and will pick me up about four.

"Now show me your property, live stock and all, and tell me of its advantages and otherwise, that I may have the right background to keep in my mind's eye when I go home. But bless me! where is your mother? and your father — perhaps he may know me!"

Lucy clung to Mrs. Lawton as she always had, with a wealth of the untutored daughterly affection that had missed its own outlet motherward, so Brooke left the two alone together for a few moments in the library while she went in to see how her father was faring. Tatters, as usual, was by his chair, not lying down but

sitting erect and close. Adam Lawton was looking intently at a picture paper that Stead had brought which was propped on the rack before him. Seeing that her father had not yet noticed her, Brooke stood quite still, watching the pair. Once in a while the left hand would pat the dog's head, that was constantly turned toward him, but Tatters' attention seemed fixed upon the useless hand that rested, a dead weight, upon the knee. Nosing it gently, as a mother dog does her sleeping pups to make sure that they are alive, Tatters moved it perhaps an inch, his eyes open wide and ears moving questioningly.

Meeting with no response, no sign of life, his dog mind evidently argued that the poor human paw was ill, and bringing the universal medicine of his race in play, he began to lick the hand with slow regular strokes of his strong, clean tongue, first going over the entire surface, then separating each finger with a clinging circular motion.

Amazement seized Brooke as the thought came to her that, after all, had not nature antedated man in this, as in many things, and endowed the tongues of the dumb beasts with the vital principles of massage? Did the dog know, with that wisdom that only the confessed materialist is willing to call mere instinct, the impotence of that right hand; and why might there not be healing in his imparted vitality? Why might not the natural

magnetism be as good as the electricity from the little machine that her mother gave her father each day?

As she thought all this, she again heard that hoarse whisper. Straining every nerve, she listened; the sound came once more—a single word, “Tatters,” repeated again and again, and lingered over as if it were a magic clew to the loosening of a tangled skein of memory.

Stepping quickly to his side, Brooke said, slowly and distinctly, “Father, Lucy Dean is here, with mother in the library. Lucy Dean — would you like to see her?” Ever since his return to Gilead, Brooke had made a point of calling Adam Lawton “father” very distinctly whenever she entered the room in his waking hours, to accustom him to the sound, also to speak of the ordinary unemotional affairs of every day as a matter of course, regardless of the fact that he did not heed.

As she repeated the words “Lucy Dean” he shook his head slightly, but the word “mother” he repeated quite distinctly several times, smiling as he did so; and then Brooke knew for a certainty that, though motive power and sense of touch and taste and smell were coming back, memory had halted, and that it was the Tatters and mother of his youth that he associated with the words.

Presently Pam came rushing in; she had tracked the footprints of her friend through the snow and had cast herself wildly against the front door, regardless

alike of paint or bruises, and scrambled into Lucy's lap in a very ecstasy. Nor was the Cub far off, and as the two young women, two dogs, and one youth trudged off presently to see the "estate," as Lucy called it, she caught the boy by the wrist and held his right palm upward as a fortune-teller might, asking what to Brooke seemed strange questions.

"Where did those blisters come from?"

"Please, teacher, I got 'em splitting wood," whined the Cub, in comic imitation of the drawl of the children at the school below at the cross-roads.

"That dark red stain?"

"Paint, off Silent Stead's box sleigh — it's been done over."

"Who, pray, is Silent Stead?"

The Cub explained with adjectives and details, while Lucy made a mental note of the same, watching Brooke out of the tail of her eye the while.

"Yes, but those dirty brown stains on the thumb and fingers — they are not paint!"

"Nope — pine tar!" jerked the Cub, uncertain whether to laugh or resent this catechising, but deciding on the former.

"Honour bright, nothing else?"

"Honour bright!"

"Then here's your pipe!" cried Lucy gayly, to the further mystification of Brooke, who could not inter-

pret the by-play. "Your birthday is half a year off and Christmas is past; what comes next? Why St. Valentine's Day, of course! It's a present for that with Pam's love and my — respects for your fortitude!" Then, rummaging in the front of her blouse, the present and only pocket universal allowed women by fashion, she drew out a leather case that enclosed a meerschauum of really beautiful curve, the bowl being the carved head of the bull terrier!

Then Brooke understood, and locking her arms in those of the other two, they slid her between them as they ran up and down an icy bit on the side road, while the Cub further suggested a good coast down the river slope on an improvised bob-sled after dinner.

But after dinner and its dishwashing, in which Lucy gayly took part, the two young women ensconced themselves so snugly before the library fire that it would have taken a stronger lure than a whiz down ever so smooth a hill to drag them forth. Then they talked woman's talk, and Brooke found herself gradually asking for people, as from the distance of another world, that two months ago she had met in almost daily intercourse; while the strangest part of all was the fact thus borne in upon her that a scant dozen, perhaps, were all among the throng who had been bound by kindred tastes which make the enduring sympathy called friendship. The rest were merely incidents, the float-

ing clouds of summer skies bred and born of the caprice of social wind and weather.

"By the way, Brooke," said Lucy, after they had travelled the old paths once more in company, "what did you do with those two thin keys that Tom Brownell picked up from under the rug the day I escorted him from your apartment at the St. Hilaire? I gave them to you afterward. Don't say that you have lost them!" and, as Brooke hesitated, Lucy sat up straight with a look of alarm.

"Oh, no, they are quite safe in a box in my drawer, though they are nothing to bother about, for they do not belong to anything of ours, and both your father and our lawyer said that they fitted no business desk or box of father's."

"That may be," said Lucy, guilelessly, "but Tom Brownell asked me particularly if I would beg you to lend them to him. You see he has a sort of genius for fitting odd numbers together, and finding those ownerless keys as he did, they seem to have fascinated him strangely."

"Tom Brownell," mused Brooke; then, becoming in her turn suddenly all on the alert, she continued: "Why, he was that reporter who contradicted the story of father's feigned illness in the *Daily Forum*, was he not? And pray, where did you stumble over him again?"

"I haven't stumbled over him — that is, I mean not to any great extent. I wish I had, for he's a most refreshing person," answered Lucy, at first surprised into confused utterance and next growing defiant and continuing recklessly: "Didn't you recognize him as the college friend of Charlie Ashton? Oh, I thought you did! Well, he is, anyway, though he wouldn't go to Charlie's red New Year's tea, even when I begged him; and he doesn't go to dances or play bridge, for he's on the jump most of the time with his newspaper work. He's been to the house a couple of times, with Charlie, of course, and father being at home and unshakable, we four have sat down to a solemn game of genuine whist; and you know yourself that to sit opposite to a youngish man for two whole evenings under such circumstances and not hate him is a proof of remarkable character, and as I can't be accused of anything of that kind, it lies with him, you see."

"Did he ask for the keys that night?" said Brooke, with overtransparent innocence, which, however, passed unnoticed.

"No, quite another time, when, having observed my intense interest in cards, he dropped in between assignments (while he was waiting for it to be time to take the speeches at an important corporation dinner, I think) and offered to teach me solitaire; but that was yet more melancholy than the whist, for as he had to look

over my shoulder, I couldn't even gaze at him, so we drifted to casino, which allowed both sight and speech!

"Really, Brooke, he is an awfully nice fellow; a gentleman and poor as a church mouse, for though Charlie says his father would overlook his distaste for the hereditary family business, a stepmother has recently occurred, whose policy it is to keep the feud boiling. But you see the fact that he can't afford to marry, as Charlie says, and plainly stating it, puts everything on a nice friendly basis, with no possible misunderstanding on either side, which is quite delightful," and Lucy bridled with an amusing air of disinterested and sisterly virtue.

So the time slipped away, as it has a way of doing under like circumstances, and the cross streak of sunlight that illuminated the title "The Pilgrim's Progress," on the lower shelf of the diamond-paned bookcase topping the desk, told Brooke, now becoming versed in the language of such things, that it was past four o'clock.

"Now we will have some tea before the Hendersons come for you," she said, moving a quaint spindle-legged table from the corner to a convenient place by the lounge, and lifting one of the flaps.

"Yes, we have it as usual every day, mother and I, all by ourselves, except once in a while when Mr. Stead joins us; and though Adam scorns tea, I find that he happens in if fresh cakes are about, and Mrs. Peck has

simply spoiled us with her seed cookies, though of course in another week that sort of thing will all be over.

"No, don't come and help, sit quite still while I get the tray and kettle. Mother will make the tea; you know the girls always said, even in the rush of the season, that a cup of her tea was something to remember, and the making of it seems to pull her together."

The three women had but just gathered about the little table, with Tatters sitting sedately beside, sniffing and coaxing for cookies, by waving one paw in the air, while Pam found herself being fed literally in the lap of luxury as personified by Lucy, when a clanging of heavy shaft-bells sounded, quite unlike the merry jingle of the usual sleigh, and then stopped suddenly, while at almost the same moment the ring in the brass lion's mouth that was the door-knocker sounded a vigorous rat-tat-tat!

"It's the Hendersons; they've come for me!" cried Lucy, looking from Mrs. Lawton to Brooke anxiously and jumping up in a confusion unusual for this young person, who prided herself upon never being caught off guard. For it suddenly occurred to her that it might be painful for her friends to have their privacy thus invaded by those who were nothing if not gossippingly critical, while at the same time she made a motion as if to put on her outer garments before answering the knock.

Brooke's face, too, reflected something of her appre-

hension, but Mrs. Lawton arose quietly, her head unconsciously taking the half backward poise of mingled dignity and courtesy which many women of her world had tried in vain to imitate. Stopping Lucy by a single gesture, she said: "Do not hurry, it is still quite early; surely our friends will be glad to join us, for they have already had a long drive and it has been growing bitterly cold these two hours past. Who did you say made up the party beside Paula and Leonie Henderson?"

"Violet Lang, the Bleecker brothers, and Charlie Ashton," replied Lucy, sinking meekly back into her chair, holding Pam up before her face as a sort of screen against consequences.

"Brooke, will you please get some fresh tea, bread, and butter, and ask Adam to show the coachman the way to the barn, where he can shelter the horses and warm himself by Larsen's little wood stove?" Then, as the second battery of knocks began, Mrs. Lawton went swiftly to the door and threw it open, revealing Charlie Ashton, enveloped to the eyes in the most picturesque of furs, beating his hands and stamping his feet with the cold.

At the unexpected sight of the sweet-faced woman at the door, backgrounded by the hospitable firelit interior, Ashton dropped back the hooded arrangement that covered his head, and, holding out both hands, grasped those of Mrs. Lawton with a fervor and expres-

sion of face that said twenty times more than the conventional words of greeting that followed.

Would they all come in for a cup of tea? Just wouldn't they, though! The ladies were growling most dangerously about the wind, their ears, etc., and he'd dig them out of that uncomfortable omnibus sleigh in a jiffy!

When the six had fairly entered and been unwrapped from their furs in the square hall, and the female portion had patted up ragged locks at Great-grandma West's eagle mirror that faced the old clock, Brooke (aided by Mrs. Peck, who arose at once to the country watchword "company") had returned with fresh tea and two plates, one of thin bread and butter, the other of wafer-like cheese sandwiches, while the hospitable influence of the teakettle put the visitors quite at their ease. As for the men, they were naturally and frankly delighted at seeing old friends, at the dogs, the genuine simplicity of the house, and with the good things.

True, the colour had rushed to Brooke's face as Charlie Ashton had greeted her, but no reference was made to the letter sent to his care save a significant pressure of the hand, which somehow gave Brooke comfort and a feeling of championship.

The women talked rather nervously of the gossip of every day and eyed the surroundings in an uncomfortable, furtive sort of way that, as Lucy wrote Brooke afterward, must have nearly made them cross-eyed. The men

roamed about openly after being bidden by their hostess to make themselves at home and go where they pleased, "even into the pantry!" This they presently did. Charlie Ashton, returning with one of Miss Keith's jars of strawberry jam carried aloft, and holding out the empty sandwich plate, begged for more bread to spread it on.

"Very well," said Brooke, recovering her old-time gayety, "only you must come to the kitchen and cut it for yourself; my hand is quite tired."

"Where did you buy such delightful sandwich bread in this out-of-the-way place?" inquired Miss Henderson, patronizingly. "It is awfully difficult to get it even in New York, and it's one of Tokay's specialties that lets him ask such fabulous prices for his sandwiches, and this is even a shade better. I wish I could get the recipe just to start a rival and pique him, he's so lordly!"

"The bread?" said Brooke, looking back over her shoulder, "oh, I make it. The recipe? That is one of the West family inheritances that I cannot part with," but as she spoke an idea entered Brooke's teeming brain, which remained there for many days awaiting development.

Then the adieus were said, Brooke whispering to Lucy, as she drew her inside for a final hug, "Remember, in the spring you are to come to stay with me, even if the sky falls."

To which Lucy replied, "If I may do as you do in every way, it is a bargain." Then the door closed, and the jingle of bells died away in the distance.

Brooke, going to the kitchen, collected the crusts clipped from the sandwiches into her chicken dish, Mrs. Peck, who had miraculously kept in the background, remarking that she never saw pleasanter gentlemen and that for solid satisfaction in feeding company, give her males.

The men, speeding downhill in the sleigh, praised house and hostesses alike and said that they had never been to a finer tea-party, the Bleecker brothers declaring that Brooke's cheese sandwiches knocked the truffle and lettuce messes of Ashton's pink, yellow, and red teas out of the game. For some unaccountable reason, however, the women were very silent, but that might have been because with Lucy's return they were again one man short.

CHAPTER XII

REVELATION

WINTER was loitering through its last calendar month, although it usually fastens its iron claws upon the first days of spring also, and is dislodged only after a gusty struggle. Brooke turned from the cross-way into the river road, upon the daily walk she forced herself to take in all but impossible weather, according to her compact with Dr. Russell. Of walking in general she would have declared that she was passionately fond, but navigating the uneven roads, scarred by the storms of a winter of unusual severity, did not come under the usual term.

After crossing an especially slippery bit she paused to rest for a moment, supporting herself by the rough fence of split rails that made a barrier between the road edge and the rocky bank which fell away, at first sharply, and then more gradually toward the Moosatuk. As she stood there, looking up and down, the saying came forcibly to her, "Whosoever loves the land in February, loves for life." Did she love nature, or was she only baffled and cowed by its omnipotence and bent to it by

the force of necessity? This day she herself could not have judged.

All the sources of inspiration seemed closed. Silence reigned in the River Kingdom; the voice of the ruler was stilled. Great, sooty crows, lean and ravenous, patrolled the river meadows, croaking ominously as they quarried a meal from the frozen wild apples, or rent asunder the few blighted ears that remained in the cornfields.

The day before had been one of sleet and wind; no human being had even passed the homestead — merely a brindled cat of the half-wild breed, and he had scuttled along on the other side of the road under cover of the wall. Robert Stead was ill of a sudden cold, Adam had reported when he returned from his daily lessons, consequently José, the Mexican half-breed factotum, had not left the shack even to fetch the mail.

Thinner than when she had come to Gilead a month before, Brooke's supple figure had the spring and elasticity of physical health in spite of its lack of roundness, for the long nights of sleep and the simplicity of the daily routine offset the strain of unaccustomed toil. Neither was she lonely in the common meaning of the word, which always implies a great degree of leisure; also she was young, and Bulwer was right — "The young are never lonely." Then there were the books that the silent man brought her — poetry, story, and all the lore

of her fellows, the birds and beasts of the field, that heretofore had been to her unknown creatures of mystery; while Adam (she had never called him the Cub since the night of his return) and she had many new sympathies, and when the boy, inspired by the talk of his teacher, rushed in to tell her of the track that he thought perhaps might belong to a fox or a mink, or with the surmise that a strange bird was feeding by the granary, she was as eager as he to see and to prove it.

The grisly mood that had seized upon her this 12th day of February was born of the sudden stepping into the foreground of the future with all its necessities, which, until that moment, had been blended optimistically with the middle distance at the very least.

In two days more Mrs. Peck's period of "accommodation" would be over; the 1st of March Larsen would go to Gordon, and the spring work must be begun if they would eat of the harvest. Toil as she and the boy might with their hands, there must either be more money, or cattle and land must be parted with, the homestead depleted, and the family start on that dreadful shrivelling process of acquiring the habit of doing with less and less, instead of pushing forward to fresh effort, which enervates the mental, and finally the moral, nature, and has made some parts of New England a graveyard of abandoned farms. For the thousandth time Brooke thought of her mother's little dower, — this,

if it had not vanished, would have more than doubled the monthly yield, — then she put the thought from her as she had done before, but this time less forcibly.

With all around ice, snow, dusky tree trunks, and rock of granite, she felt all the sensations that would belong to a wild animal at bay. Indeed, she might have lingered on there to her hurt, had not Tatters barked and pulled her by the skirt.

“Yes, I will come now, old man! I’m sorry I stood so long; I know your paws must be chilled!” she exclaimed ruefully. “You want to go to Gilead village instead of to the foot of Windy Hill to see old Mrs. Fenton? Well, so be it, we shall see more people on that road; besides, I think that both you and I need something from the store, — post-stamps, and lavender oil, for I’m going to try my hand at painting, you see, Tatters, if it’s only Easter bonbonnières. Cookies? Yes, sugar cookies, and you can get two stale ones for this penny. Watch out, Tatters,” and Brooke, throwing off her dismal mood with an effort, held the copper coin before his nose as she spoke, and the dog, comprehending either tone, word, gesture, or all three, preceded his mistress joyfully in an uneven but steady trot, that ate up the road and caused her fairly to break step in order not to be left behind.

The cookies were bought and eaten, mistress and dog resting awhile at the little shop that sold simple drugs,

etc., and eleven o'clock saw Brooke climbing the upper road toward home. She had gone but half of the way when, missing Tatters, she turned about to look for him. Whistling and waiting a moment, she saw his head appearing slowly over the last upward roll in the road, and noticed that he was limping painfully. She hurried back to where he had paused, as soon as he knew that he was in no danger of being deserted, and he began to lick one of his front paws, which had been cut by a sharp, jagged piece of ice, and which was bleeding profusely. Kneeling in the road beside him, Brooke moistened her handkerchief by the slow process of holding snow in her hands until it melted, and, after cleansing the cut as well as she could, wound the handkerchief tight around it.

"You can't hobble a mile in this plight, neither can I carry you. Will you lie up there on that dry moss in the spot where the snow has melted, and wait until I can send Adam for you?" and Brooke took a few steps uphill to illustrate what she meant while waiting for his answer.

No, Tatters emphatically declined to wait, for as soon as she had moved a step he began to hobble on three legs, while at the same time the leaden sky shed a few big snowflakes, as if to show casually what might be expected at any time before night. So his mistress halted and began to look about as if for a possible suggestion.

Presently the head of a meek, ginger-coloured horse began to rise above a steep "thank-you-ma'am." A stout body and four legs followed, next a covered wagon, such as milk peddlers use, with a glass front, through which a man's face looked out. The sight was such a relief to Brooke that she made no pretence of concealing the fact, but waited until the team came alongside, when she read the legend "Mrs. Banks' Homemade Pies," printed in elaborately shaded letters on the side of the canopy.

The horse stopped of its own accord on the small plateau, the driver dropped his window and looked out, smiling cheerfully. It was anything but a handsome face, — that of a man who was probably sixty but might be less, weathered and somewhat sharp; small gray eyes, but with a merry twinkle, peered from under shaggy, sandy eyebrows, that matched a half-starved mustache. The hair of the head was gray, and from it at right angles two very sizable ears stuck out with somewhat startling effect. Yet, in spite of these details, the whole was a face to inspire trust.

"Miss Keith West's dog, and in trouble, I take it," was his opening remark. "I'm goin' straight past her house, and I'll fetch him up if you like and relieve your mind, as you seem partial to animals."

"Could you take me, too?" asked Brooke, returning his smile, "that is, if I shall not make your load too

heavy, for though Tatters seems to know you" (Tatters had given the coolest sort of tail wag at the sound of the man's voice), "I'm afraid he will not go without me."

"So you are travelling uphill too — climb right in, though I reckon you'll hev to set on this box here. Do you happen to be one uv Miss Keith's folks that owns the farm and wuz comin' to live there when she goes to Boston? Though, as I says to my wife (she's *Mrs. Banks, Homemade Pies*, and I'm Mr. Banks that peddles 'em, besides raisin' and pickin' the berries and apples and pumpkins fer their innards, along with a considerable lot of garden sass), I says, 'Keith'll never make up her mind to go; the city isn't all it's cracked up to be when onct you're used to plenty o' room to move and free empty air.' What air there is in big cities is so chuck full o' noise and smell and one thing and another, you wouldn't know it. Why, it's worse than the Methody church down in the holler, when they had a revival meetin' on a summer night, and felt called to close the winders on account of gnats.

"Yes, I lived in N' York six months, — it'll be nigh five years ago. You see, the farm didn't pay as it uster when I raised six children on it and we was all satisfied. Everything doin' got to be more wholesale and knocked out us small fry. Next, for a spell, I took to the railroad; got a job through one of the big bugs down ter Stonebridge, and after a time got ter be conductor on

the through express freight, sleepin' home every other night. Well, it gave me a chance to see life, I'm glad to say, for which I'd allus hankered, but it was a nervous job, and kep' me too far above the ground, which was my born station.

"Then the boys coaxed ma and me to go to N' York, she to keep a flat for 'em, — I suppose maybe you've seen one o' them contrary sort of outfits, a floor divided up small like a parlour box car for racing stock, well enough looking till you close the doors, then everybody shook up together until you're sick o' the sight and smell o' your very own. All of God's sunlight you get is what's dribbled in down a flue, like the chute of a feed bin, and not a scrap o' grass to bleach clothes on, only to hang 'em out in a little narrer place to sweat on a line like bacon in a smoke-house. Mother withered so that summer I was afeared she'd let go the tree before autumn, like a windfall apple; and as for the 'genteel work for my old age' the boys had got me — genteel be *damned!* I beg your pardon, Miss — ?"

"Lawton."

"Oh, then you are one o' Miss Keith's kin. But that word's one that remains of my experience on the through freight that somehow's too handy, though wrong, to be quite give up. What was that job with short hours that was to keep me clean-handed and from bendin' my back? To wear a plum-red coat, like a circus monkey,

and stand in a bank on a stone floor, that made me cold as an ice pond when you hole fer frost fish, without the pleasure o' catchin', and openin' and shuttin' the door all day fer a lot of fool Jays and Jenny Wrens, well able to do it fer themselves, and me reachin' toward sixty! *Genteel nothin'!* My spirit broke before noon of the second day, and goin' to that flat I just picked up mother and we lit out fer home, which the summer folks that rented it had left, we leavin' a note behind like young folks 'lopin'. Then, when we'd set and considered a spell, the Lord pointed out pies, like a sky-fallen revelation; the boys caved in and gave us a horse; now life's jest a hummin' along brisk as a swarm o' bees! And once more the Lord's borne it in upon us two old folks, after that discipline of city life, that if we was goin' to scratch a livin' nowadays we'd got to give folks jest what they want, and make it good, and no skimpin'. Folks in Gilead County eats pies, and they need 'em good!"

"Cousin Keith has been away a month now," said Brooke, when Mr. Banks paused for breath, "and she writes that she is enjoying herself immensely, so I do not think that she is likely to return."

"She's actoolly gone, then? That knocks me out," said the pieman, with a disappointed droop in his voice. "I didn't know that, fer I've been goin' the short way and haven't been over this upper road since New Year,

the goin's been so bad. I allus reckoned on puttin' up at the West farm for the noon hour to bait Maria here and get my coffee het up; but maybe your ma won't fancy shelterin' strangers, for I think Miss Keith said the farm came through the female line and was again rightly vested in a female."

"I own the farm, and I shall be very glad to have you rest and feed your horse there and take your dinner with us to-day," said Brooke, taking a mischievous satisfaction in the effect of her words on the funny little man.

"You! a slip of a girl like you own the snuggest small place in the county, and best kep' up!" he ejaculated, his jaw dropping with reflex wonder; "but maybe you're married?"

"No."

"Keepin' company, then?"

"No" — this time Brooke had great difficulty in controlling either voice or countenance.

"Left a beau in town or in foreign parts somewhere, then?" he persisted, almost anxiously.

"No" — but this time the word had a different sound.

"Not even got picked out yet? well, I want ter know! I thank you kindly for yer invitation, and I'll be pleased to go in. Hev you got a ma and pa, or only a hired man?"

With a person of his persistence social topics might have now become embarrassing, but chance turned the subject at the right moment, taking the shape of a covey of quail, huddled under some cedar bushes by the roadside. The pieman spied them first, and at his sharp pull patient Maria stopped, although the spot was not very suitable for such a halt. Brooke expected to see the flock either rise in a body or disappear in the underbrush, but they did neither, only huddling still closer, while, inexperienced as she was, she noticed that even their ruffled feathers illy hid the leanness of their bodies.

"The game along this route has suffered this winter, and it's missed me," he whispered, preparing to raise the curtain on the opposite side of the wagon to the birds.

"Raise up a minute, please, so's I can git some buckwheat out uv that box, and keep a hand on Tatters, else, lame as he is, he'll out and flush the covey."

Brooke did as she was told, while the pieman scooped up a handful of unhulled buckwheat from the box, and, letting himself down quietly from the wagon, scattered it among the bayberry bushes, not too near to the flock, yet in plain sight of it. Returning, he re-fastened the curtain and started the horse again before he said a word in answer to the interrogation of Brooke's face. Reaching the next level, a dozen rods on, he half turned the wagon in order to give a clear view down the hill; the

quail had crossed the road and were feeding eagerly upon the buckwheat, like a brood of chickens.

"Puzzled, ain't yer, ter see a Yankee scatterin' good fodder by the way?" said the pieman, highly gratified. "Well, it may seem uncommon, but the truth is these five years I've been peddlin' and coverin' a wild tract of country twict every week in cold and heat, rain and sun, I've come to think that man ain't the only created thing that the Lord has cause to be proud uv or care fer. I've got kinder close to the wild folks along the route, which after all is but accordin' to Scripture, that bids us 'Consider the way the lilies grow and look to the fowls of the air,' and says the Lord himself ain't too busy to indulge in counting sparrers — (if he'd only worded it song or chippin' sparrers it would be more comfortin', though he couldn't hev meant English ones, cause that island wasn't discovered in those days, and so is of no account in Scripture, which must rile their pride).

"I allus did like birds, even way back when I followed the plough, and of course I knew some of them apart, — robins and swallers and phœbes and hawks and all the gamies, — and I jest plumb knew that when crows sat on the fence a-quaverin', it was interestin' and worthy conversation, most like, if we could only sense it. But it was after that hell-fire summer in the city that I got the call to treat 'em like my brothers and help 'em out with food in winter like we would neighbouring house folks.

"Soon as it come hot weather there, that time in N' York, I couldn't set closed into meetin' of Sundays (though mother, she sit it out for sake of principle), and I don't believe the Lord does, either, — stands to reason he's got too much sense, not havin' to set an example, — so I uster wander out through that long narrer park o' theirs, and when onct I cut clean through westward, I strayed into that big museum where they keep the natural relics, and there I come face to face with all the birds that ever wuz together since Eve's time. When I'd observed all the cockatoos and parrer-keets and such like, I went on a bit further, 'n if there warn't a pattridge a struttin' on the leaves with his tail all fanned out, and beyond it the brown eggs was nested in a ground holler. I passed that by and next I seen a catbird in a syringa bush and a robin on an apple branch and a highholder on a stump, that set my heart a-bumpin' so I was all of a tremble and sidled off into a small room to set down. When I looked up next, what was there in a case marked something about 'seasonable birds' but a big medder lark. His breast was jest as fresh and yaller as when he sings from a tree-top to yer in plantin' time, or turns and teeters on a fence to keep you from seein' him too plain, and it seemed as if I heard him calling fer spring. That broke me all up, and I jest leaned over and cried it out into the white Sunday handkerchief mother got me, 'cause my red ones jarred the boys.

"I think it was the sight of those birds gave me grit to break loose fer home. That next winter a woman we sold eggs to over in Gordon, seein' my fancy, gave me a book all about their ways and needs, and so ever since I've been with 'em in heart. My, but ain't they company along the lonely road bits and in early mornings when I'm comin' home! (I go up Tuesdays and Fridays to sleep at Sairy Ann's, my wife's sister's house near Gordon, startin' fer home next dawn.)

"Along in April to see the woodcock flirt an' dance's as good's a circus. Sometime, maybe, 'twould pleasure you to take the trip with me, and Sairy Ann'd be proud to hev you stop with her. My, here we are at your corner! How good conversation does pass the time!"

Without in the least realizing that he had been doing the whole of the talking, the pieman handed Brooke out at the door stone, Tatters limping carefully after, and Maria turned down the lane to the barn, with which she was perfectly familiar.

Brooke, hastening in to explain their unique guest to her mother and tend the sick paw, found that Mrs. Peck had been sent for to "sit up" with a bereaved household down at Gilead; telling Mrs. Lawton that it was expected of her, no matter whom she might be "accommodating," she had left immediately, promising to return the next night.

Brooke prepared the dinner, to which was added as a contribution, received in the spirit in which it was offered, one of Mrs. Banks' most juicy whortleberry pies (truly the best of its kind), which the Cub pronounced to be "just bully," while in turn the pieman praised Brooke's coffee, and, for some reason that he could not have explained, kept his knife in abeyance, while by his cheerful common sense gained the respect of his entertainers.

After he had left, taking Brooke's ready promise to go over the route with him some spring day to see the woodcock dance and hear the partridge drum, the cloud that his cheerfulness had lifted again settled over the girl's spirits. Why was no gleam vouchsafed to lighten her darkness as the vision of pies had led these humble people into a sort of promised land?

When she had washed the dishes and made everything neat, it was still only half-past two. She could neither sew nor read nor settle herself to write to Lucy Dean, her usual outlet when cast down; a new sort of restlessness seized her, that of a wild animal caged, who paces to and fro to its own exhaustion.

Looking into her father's room, she saw that he slept, while Tatters, his hurt paw comfortably stretched out, lay on the rug. Her mother was writing letters at the old desk; and going out to the barn she found the Cub, with Pam of course close by, mending some spring

traps that he discovered in an old barrel, and preparing to set them, for mink or weasel tracks, he could not tell which, had been seen that morning about the chicken house. He was so absorbed and fascinated with his occupation that he only grunted answers to his sister's questions, so she returned to the house, realizing that the change was doing wonders for the Cub, which was one consolation.

"What is the matter with me?" she said, half aloud. "Is it an illness coming on? or can it be the painting fever? The air seems to sparkle and rush through me like electricity! Oh, why did I not work harder when I had the time? for now if the desire comes I cannot stop," and Brooke wrung her hands, and then laughed hysterically at her tragic action.

Going to her room, she unpacked palette and paint box, and took the maul stick from the closet, where it had remained all winter tied to some umbrellas. Of canvas she had none, but hunting up some bits of manila board from between her books, she took them to the kitchen and spread them on the table, where she had left the turpentine and oil. What should she try? The snow and rock bit from the window lacked colour and was too harsh in outline to be seductive to her mood. A scarlet geranium in a pot against the dark window frame caught her eye, and seating herself, she began to draw it in rapidly with chalk — anything, if it would only

find vent for the fever of action that tingled in her finger tips.

She was surprised to find that a certain accuracy as well as facility of touch had not left her, in spite of stiffened fingers and lack of practice. For her colour sense she claimed no credit; it was born with her. But after the outline took shape and she began to paint and give it texture, she dropped her brush again as the words of Lorenz seemed whispered in her ears, "You have not yet had the awakening, for it you must wait; it is the same with me; you must interpret your vision and see it on the canvas before you can create; but first of all you must know and feel, even if you suffer."

The awakening had not come to her, and still she waited; did she not now know and feel, and had she not suffered enough? The stiff geranium cramped in its pot bore her no message to interpret, and as a snow-squall darkened her window she cast the brush aside. Shivering at the utter silence of the house, she fled to her room and, throwing herself face downward on her bed, was abandoning herself to the spirits of darkness, when the thought of her other self, radiating light as Lorenz had painted her, crossed her wild mood, checking it, and she lay quite still until her pounding heart calmed to its regular beating, when bodily fatigue claimed its dole and she fell asleep.

When she awoke it was after five o'clock; the squall had passed away and sunset light was warming the whole sky, even taking the chill from the full moon, which it had worn on its apparent rise from the river ice.

Below stairs everything was as she had left it, and yet a different atmosphere pervaded the place, and the tension left her throat. The Cub came in with the news, at which he seemed to think she would rejoice, that Robert Stead was better and would be out again on the morrow. Her mother expressed unfeigned pleasure, and Brooke was almost ashamed of the fact that she had for the moment forgotten that he was ill. Yet she always enjoyed his visits and watched for them, for he was a travelled and well-read man, and, when off his guard, most entertaining, and not without a certain compelling magnetism.

"Let's hurry supper," said the Cub, when he had brought in the milk. "I've had the last milking lesson I need, and I can do it all right now without pulling too hard, or squirting, or laming my wrists. Larsen says I'll be worth twenty a month and board by summer if I keep on steady, — just as if I wouldn't! But I've got to keep the other end up besides, and I've some reading to do to-night, if I'm going up to the shack again in the morning." Crossing the kitchen, he picked his mother up as if she had been a feather, and whirling her about,

gave her a hearty kiss that sent a glow to her heart and cheeks at the same time, before he seated her, like a small child, on the table edge, where she struggled, laughed, and was sublimely happy at his rough caress. Then, further to carry out his genial mood, he bounced into his father's room and, wheeling him to the kitchen, pushed the chair close to the table, and thus they all supped together, a circumstance that had seemed impossible in Mrs. Peck's presence.

After Adam Lawton had gone to bed, the Cub helping him as usual, the boy settled himself by the bright lamp in the kitchen with his books, while Mrs. Lawton and Brooke sat by the firelight in the library, talking quietly. Brooke, hunched on the rug, leaned her head back against her mother's knee, and yielded to the soothing touch of gentle fingers upon her eyes and brow.

Presently Tatters began to growl deeply and give what they had learned to designate as his animal bark, quite different in quality from that with which he announced the approach of man. Pam, of course, joined him, springing from the cushioned chair in which she slept.

The Cub went to the door and listened — cackles of alarm were coming from the chicken house.

"It's the weasel or mink, or whatever it was that prowled last night," he reported. "I'll go out and see,

because Stead says that sometimes, if you leave them all night, they gnaw out of the trap. Don't you want to come too, Sis? Hurry up, then, and get your cape. No, don't let the dogs out, they'll get pinched in the trap, or chew the beast up, maybe, and I want to keep him whole. I guess the moon is bright enough, we will not need the lantern," and seizing a stout stick, the Cub tiptoed carefully out to make as little noise as possible, not having yet learned that to wild animals scent serves as a warning even more than sound. Brooke, however, preferred to take the lantern, and lighting it, she quickly followed.

The Cub examined his traps. They were untouched, but as he knelt he saw a straight row of tracks in the snow, that were too large to belong to either weasel or mink. Following these, they led him around to the roosting house. There, between it and the open yard, something that appeared to be a small dog crouched in the corner.

The moon shone brightly between the buildings, and every hair of the little beast stood out as clearly as by electric light.

"It's a half-grown fox," whispered the Cub, to Brooke. "Good work if I can only kill it; there'll be one less to kill the fowls. Look out that it doesn't dodge past you there, Sis," and the Cub was going toward it, club raised. But the little fox never stirred.

They could only tell that it was alive by the heaving of its lean sides.

"Stop!" said Brooke, hoarsely, laying a detaining and no very gentle touch on her brother's arm. "I won't have it killed. I believe that it is starving, like those quails I saw this morning, only they could move, and this fox is too weak. I'm going to take it in the barn and feed it, and make it live. Get me some milk, and eggs, and meat."

"You're crazy, Sis; it is only a fox, and they're bad things. It'll bite you and make no end of a row," but as he glanced at her face he saw something there that stopped all argument, and he hastened to obey.

Then Brooke, placing the lantern on the ground, drew nearer to the little beast. Yes, he was starving. He tried to stand and toppled over against the shed; he was powerless and at bay. Fixing her eyes on his, she read his feelings interpreted by her own of that very afternoon, and kneeling there in the snow, she understood him.

A vital wave swept over her. Hanging the lantern on her arm, she slipped the cape from off her shoulders with a swift movement, and covered the fox with it, wrapping him completely. Then, lifting him in her arms, for he was less weighty than a well-fed cat, she carried the bundle to the barn, and slipping the latch, laid the poor little beast on the haymow,

a futile snap and snarl or two having been its only protests.

When the Cub returned with the various articles of food, he was astonished to see the pair facing each other, not a yard apart, with the lantern hanging from a beam shedding light upon the strange scene.

While the Cub was near the fox would not touch the food, but when he hid from its sight, after a time it lapped the egg that Brooke broke and put before it, as a dog would, and presently the milk; then, still wearing the hunted look, settled deeper into the hay lair where she had placed it, panting and with lolling tongue.

"We will go away now and leave it in peace; only promise me, Adam, that when it grows strong it shall run free, and no one shall kill it; remember, it is my guest." Adam promised, and hastily securing the latch, they went back to the house. The Cub went to the library to tell his mother of the adventure, but Brooke lingered in the kitchen. A half-hour passed, and hearing no sound, the Cub went to the door. Returning softly, he beckoned his mother to follow, and together they stood in the shadow of the doorway, looking into the room. Two lamps stood side by side on the mantelshelf, casting an oblique light; below and at one side of the fireplace stood Brooke, palette in hand, a straight-backed chair before her; resting on its arms, as if it were an easel, was the great oblong bread-board,

and on this the girl was painting, with broad rapid strokes, the head of a fox. Her cloak still hung from her shoulders, her cheeks glowed; her eyes they could not see until she half turned her head for a moment as if following a strayed memory, then they noticed a strange light in them as of inspiration.

Quietly they crept back into the dark and waited. An hour passed; still Brooke kept at work. Another thirty minutes and they heard the chair move and again they went to the door.

Brooke stood back from the improvised easel, her hands behind her, looking at her work. From the board gazed back the head of the little fox, roughly done, but with the look in its eyes at once hunted, defiant, and pleading, — not an image, a created thing, living and breathing. Through suffering and its kinship had come the revelation to Brooke that if she willed she might be the painter of animals, and as she looked again, Lorenz' words sounded in her ears. She had felt and suffered, and had seen her vision in the eyes of the hunted beast. She had interpreted it, she felt for what it stood, and now, crude as was the labor, it lived under her brush. She had awakened, but the strength of the vital touch was his, and he could not know it. Kneeling before the chair with clasped hands, as if at some shrine, not to the picture, but to what it stood for, Brooke took new courage.

Before his mother could restrain Adam he had dashed across the kitchen, and stood a moment with his hands resting on his sister's shoulders. Then, without warning, he tipped back her head and gave her a kiss of genuine boyish enthusiasm, crying, "That's a living picture all right, Sis. Look out it don't get away from you. I bet you've struck your luck this time."

CHAPTER XIII

AT THE SIGN OF THE FOX

IN the morning the Cub hastened to the barn. Either the old-fashioned latch had sprung up, or some one had been there before him, for the little fox, having eaten every scrap of food, and thereby gained strength, had gone his way, which, according to the string of footprints, was up in the rock and hemlock country behind the farm. Yet after supper on that night, and all the others that came before the spring thawing, a woman's figure, wearing a cape under which was concealed a dish of scraps, outwitting Tatters, slipped from the pantry door, and going around the barn, halted at a flat rock set in a group of hemlocks, presently returning with the empty platter, her face wearing as rapt an expression as that of some pious woman of old carrying food to the haunts of hermit or saint of the pillar.

February, as if sick of its dreary self, suddenly fell away before March's vigour, and its first gusty mood had softened before Brooke and Adam realized themselves at least the sole guardians of their parents and

the homestead; yet in spite of this and the work it entailed, the Cub managed to spend at least a couple of hours a day with Stead at the lodge on Windy Hill, and Brooke tried to snatch a little time for painting, but even with her mother's help her toil was by far more constant and exacting than her brother's. However, direct motive had come to both of them, and that alone can make one walk sure-footed on the tight rope which at intervals through life replaces a safe path. Brooke worked persistently, using Tatters, Pam, and Robert Stead's hunting dogs as studies, conscious of crudeness, imperfections, and the need of criticism, but letting nothing quench her spirit as long as the spark of vitality flashed back at her. She longed for the warm weather to come, so that she might work outdoors, and use as a studio an old hay-thatched shed on the hillside, once a sheepfold, which opened northeast toward the river valley.

At this juncture Robert Stead, whose technical training and passionate love of nature and animal life gave his words more than a casual value, stepped in, both as encourager and critic, and Brooke eagerly promised to try a picture of Manfred,—“a serious order,” Stead called it,—as soon as the season would permit. Meantime he brought her books and studies of animal anatomy, of whose cost she little guessed, and in explaining the details to her forgot both his warp and

himself, becoming for the time that most enthralling of beings, the man of middle age who blends all the directness and fervour of youth with the subtle and reassuring charm of matured experience.

Was it a wonder that Brooke was glad at his coming? Between herself and the usual man twice her age she would have felt need for greater ceremony of outward deference. With Stead the friendship had begun on the most informal of footings, and been almost instantly cemented with the gratitude born of his kindness to her brother, as well as the mutual isolation of the two households; while over it all hung Dr. Russell's words of caution, that owing to the peculiar circumstances of his life, she must not regard Stead in the same light as other men or magnify his little acts of kindness. Dear honest doctor, even he, with all his fine humanity, could not diagnose the human emotions with anything like finality.

Here again the need of money in hand, even for canvas, pressed upon Brooke, and like many another before her, she seized what came nearest to hand; and when the Cub discovered a head of Pam upon the cover of the sugar bucket, he straightway removed it from the closet to his room, thereby letting some very early ants into the sugar.

One great lesson in portrait art Brooke learned for herself in those lonely days, that whatever the care

and detail of finish, the life and likeness is the work of but a few strokes.

Meanwhile the fox's head on the bread-board stood on the mantel-shelf in 'the kitchen, watching Brooke as she went about her work, until she began to feel a mysterious kinship with the little doglike animal of the narrow eyes, and talked to it as if it was a human companion.

One day she had gone for a call at Mrs. Enoch Fenton's, where, ever since that first January afternoon, she went when the tension of the mental and physical became too great, to be soothed and relaxed by the cripple's cheerful common sense. She felt more than ever the absolute necessity of adding at once to the family income, as for the second time since their arrival she had been obliged to draw on the slender principal. Though the real motive for the visit was to consult the Deacon, indirectly, through his wife, about the likelihood of finding a man willing to cultivate the farm on shares, the talk drifted toward the topic of ways and means, in spite of Brooke's constant resolve to keep such matters to herself.

"If you want to get folks' money steady," Mrs. Fenton said, pausing in her occupation of sewing a button on one of the Deacon's blue hickory shirts, and using her thimble finger to point and emphasize her remarks, "you must give 'em something they

want and need in exchange for it, and what they need most constant is something good to eat!"

Brooke smiled to herself, thinking of the pieman's similar reasoning concerning his wife's "revelation," but did not in any way apply the matter personally, until Mrs. Fenton's next sentence.

"The jell and jam market is a good one, only it's pretty well taken up, hereabouts, by Miss Ryerson at the Mill Farm, t'other side of Stonebridge. She puts up for nearly all the city people clear through to Gordon, and last year she added cherry bounce and blackberry brandy. Strange enough, too, made by your Great-grandmother West's rule, — I suppose you know she accommodated wayfarers with meat and drink down at the farm, and being strictly temperance had a great name for her ginger-mint pop; the rule is in my book now. The old sign used to be in the far side of your attic, behind the four-poster — it was a fox chasin' a goose, and I always heard it came from the old country; that reminds me, Enoch says that old bed is set up, and your father's sleepin' on it again — well, old times lets go hard sometimes.

"Why, last year Miss Ryerson cleared two thousand above the wages of her woman she keeps now to help her out. Of course there's more in making such things than meets the eye of those that hasn't been inside the preservin' kettle, so to speak. It's the keepin'

sound and eatin' well that counts, and that's why, like everything else, for every ten that tries the business, nine drop out because they pinch and neglect, and slop somewhere, and don't give the best there is. In eatin' there's always a market for the best. But jam and jell won't do for you, for let alone not havin' experience, you'd have to put out everything for a season to catch your market, same as they cast away samples of new soap and bakin' powder.

"Oh, yes, I almost forgot that you were askin' about that man for the ploughing! Enoch saw a big strong Dane, or Swede, or some of those north-country people, down at the smithy last night. He's come here lately, and hired the little Bisbee cottage on the river road — plans to fix it up, and plant a bit of garden, 'n make it ready for his sweetheart that's coming over in the fall. They say he's got a bit of money saved and table boards at Bisbee's sister's. He wants to work on shares or by the day this season, so's to have time for his own work between. He brought a letter to Mr. Denny, the printer down at the *Bee* office, and he says he'll recommend him willing. Somebody like that, steady, and who would go ahead, would be better for a girl like you than a wild Polack that you'd have to manage, or one of our town boys that would likely feel called to boss you. Father says the fellow doesn't own a horse mower yet, but we'll lend ours, and you've got

a plough and scythes, as I suppose Keith showed you. Father'll bargain with him for you, and plan out the work — he thinks it'll be better to let the man see you've a farming friend that knows, to come between you and what you've never seen done, and in consequence hev no notion of."

Thanking the dear old lady both with words and the spontaneous kiss of sudden gratitude, which she prized far more, Brooke walked home in a sort of dream. She passed, quite unheeded, the blooming hepaticas clustering amid the dry leaves in a sunny spot on the road bank, though she had been looking among their thick ruddy leaves for the flowers ever since Stead had shown her where they were bedded a week before. A song-sparrow, perched on a twig of silvery pussy-willow, threw back his head as she passed, and poured forth the most melodious verse of his changeful song. She scarcely heard it, or if she did, paid no heed, any more than she did to the fact that Tatters had flushed a partridge down in one of the wood roads that start from the highway and end in silence, leaving her for its ecstatic but fruitless quest.

Going to the kitchen, she stood before the mantel-shelf looking at the fox, as if at an oracle that must one day speak to her. Then something cool seemed to touch her brain, clearing it and crystallizing her thoughts, as it had that night when the plan of coming

to the homestead drove away the oppression of despair itself.

"Yes," she said aloud, "to win money it must be the best of its kind. What can I do that is the best? — paint animals? by and by perhaps — but for daily bread this spring? Ah, it has come! I can make sandwiches, all kinds, of the very best (how the Hendersons and Bleeckers gobbled them up), to go with mother's tea, also the bread for them! I will make the summer drink of ginger ale, ice, a lemon slice, and three sprigs of mint, that father once said tasted so much better than the ginger-root affair they bottle for sale. I will play I am Great-granny West, swing out my sign, and 'accommodate wayfarers' — that is, the pleasure-drivers between Stonebridge and Gordon — with food and drink, as Mrs. Fenton put it! She says a day never passes from May to November but what people in driving stop, and beg to buy even bread and milk. Grandma West's sign was a fox and a goose, but to-day geese are out of the running. My sign shall be only the Sign of the Fox. You shall hang out over the gate on the old pine in an iron frame, and talk wisely to the passers-by," she said, looking up at the picture.

Then, taking the bread-board down from the shelf, she kissed the fox on the nose in the fervour of hope that was dawning.

"Instead of cakes and ale, or anything like that, you shall have just one word — tea — painted over you, and we will leave them to guess the rest," and Brooke, who was in a mood to declare that the wise beast winked, and licked his lips, needs must laugh at the curious yet satisfactory blending of her dreams of the future, love, painting, and fame, with the eternal everyday theme, bread and butter!

After a moment the revulsion came. What would her mother say? That passed away in the thought that she could not object, for to act untrammelled was unquestionably the first link in the chain by which Brooke was to endeavour to keep the family bound together. Yet it was a relief when, an hour later, the plan had been thoroughly discussed and formulated, to find that her mother not only fully approved, but was already on the alert, and full of suggestions to make the simple service as dainty as might be.

Silent Stead was the first to throw a wet blanket upon the scheme, his reasons being purely personal, as it usually developed that they were; though he would bitterly have resented the idea of it. He found it difficult to put his objections into reasonable words, and so merely retired within himself, and was "grumpy," as the Cub put it.

The Cub came back from the village a few days later with the rings and frame for the sign, which the

blacksmith had fashioned; and Brooke, after varnishing the bread-board well to keep out the weather, had fitted it in place, and was looking at the result when Stead came in. In his arms he carried several packages of bulbs and garden seeds for her, which he dropped on the table. He had a lovely hillside garden of his own below the lodge, which he and José tended, and already he was planning a more elaborate arrangement of the old-fashioned kitchen garden at the farm than Miss Keith had attempted, saying, in answer to Brooke's objection, that it would perhaps be more than they could care for:—

“Turn about is fair play; you give me, an idler, a daily resting spot between the valley and the hill; why may I not give you a spot to rest in between the day's work? For God's sake, do not make me feel more of a cumberer of the ground than necessary!”

As for the gifts of seeds and roots, to Mrs. Lawton, accustomed as she had been to the perfect southern courtesy of such things, that bore no obligation between neighbours and equals, they seemed quite matters of course, and of no special import.

Mrs. Fenton, when Brooke told her of the new venture, and consulted her as to the ways of the great folk of the neighbourhood, and their seasons for coming and going, had expressed her opinion that the first of May was time enough to begin, as then the people

in general ran over from Boston and New York for a few days at a time to start the wheels in motion, and take a breath of air. This left Brooke a full month for her preparations, and both Robert Stead and the mail carrier noticed the frequency with which letters flew between herself and Lucy Dean during this time.

Brooke, at first being humble-minded as to her ability, and therefore as to the prices to be charged, was gradually convinced by her hard-headed friend that if her wares were the equal of those which Tokay furnished the same patrons at their houses in town, why might she not charge the same at the wayside tea garden of the Moosatuk, where such things had hitherto not only been unattainable but unknown?

To clinch her unanswerable argument, Lucy had made and sent to her friend a box of dainty cards, such as are often used at bazaars in private houses. A fox's head appeared at the top — next below TEA, lemon or cream — MILK — FOXHEAD JULEP (the name with which they had christened Granny West's delicious ginger, lemon, and mint concoction). Then followed the price-list of sandwiches — cheese — potted chicken — lettuce — jam, and plain bread and butter, singly or by the dozen, according to Tokay's schedule. And Brooke accepted Lucy's advice, but exacted a promise that she should tell no one, nor exploit

the plan in any way, saying, "I want the venture to make its way from the inside out, not from the outside in."

Thus the matter was settled, and when mother and daughter had agreed that it was best to use the exquisite fern-leaf china cups and saucers for their added attraction over commoner china, and there seemed nothing more to do but to work along in the interim, a new difficulty suddenly smote Brooke. Though she and her mother might brew and bake, who was to serve the tea to those who, lacking footmen, wished it brought to carriage or served in the porch, which Brooke already called her Tea Garden, where she planned, if business warranted, to place some seats and small tables?

One day, the very last of March, Deacon Fenton stopped at the West farm, and in answer to Mrs. Lawton's urgent invitation to come in, replied: "Thank you kindly, but not to-day. I'm looking for that farmer daughter of yours. I've fetched up the new man, and given him an idee of the plantin'. He seems to sense it all right, though he's kinder soft and unconditioned, and slow for spring ploughin', and his hands blister up so's I told him he'd better wear sheepskin mits fer a spell, as it's some time he claims since he worked land for his mother. That don't count, however, when it's work on shares. You get your half jest the same if he's a week doin' a day's work,

and that's the sense on it fer a girl like yourn, who can't be expected to drive farm hands up to the bit, as must be did if you're goin' to git enough offen your land to feed a sparrer! Where's the young lady? A-paintin' pussy cats — no, I think it was wild rabbits likely, in the barn, Adam said, only I didn't see her when I tied up. I thought maybe she'd like to go down to the ploughed field, and be made acquainted with her new help. She won't need to bother much with him, not payin' out wages, but it may come in handy for her to have speech with him, jest the same.

“Say, Mis' Lawton, the tea and spice pedler saw that fox-head sign, settin' in there in the kitchen, and he says the firm he travels fer are just introducing a new brand of condensed goat's milk, and if she'd paint out a nice, white, lively-lookin' goat with a pretty, dressed-up baby sittin' on its back, and a dreadful thin baby sittin' on the road a-crying 'cause she didn't get none, he reckons he could get her all of twenty-five dollars for it — maybe more. There's a fine big carriage goat boardin' at Bisbee's fer the winter that she could copy — 'tain't a milking one, but she might add to it a little. Thought I'd jest mention it; you know 'tain't often she might get the chance to turn picture paintin' into something useful and instructive and payin' all to onct.”

At this juncture Brooke appeared to speak for herself, and, after she had cleaned the paint from her

fingers with turpentine, the shrewd old farmer and the warm-hearted young enthusiast walked side by side down the cross-road, skirting the hay-field, now growing green around the moist edges. The meadow-larks were soaring and singing, the first white butterflies fluttered in the sun, and down from the garden wafted an odour that tells of spring in every quarter of the globe, the perfume of the little white English violets. These nestled in sociable tufts under the protection of the leafless bushes of crimson and damask roses in the garden that Great-granny West had planted, — violets whose ancestors had doubtless come overseas in company with the Sign of the Fox and the Goose.

The unploughed corn-field lay to the right of the cross-road, and to reach it they were obliged to skirt a small field of fall-sown rye that was bounded by the roadway. As they picked their way along the stubbly edge, between which and the stone fence ran one of those little brooks of the hill countries that brawl and rush along in spring and autumn, but shrink away and keep their silence in summer heat and winter cold alike, Brooke paused once or twice to look upon her River Kingdom, which, after the rain and freshet of a week past, was now showing the first real signs of life. Dun and gray were still the prevailing hues of the river woods, except where a ruddy

or golden glow lying on the tree-tops told of swamp maples or willows. The hemlocks on the rocky banks looked rusty and winter-worn, not having yet donned their curved-tipped new feathers. The marsh meadows, thickly studded with ponds by the overflow, alone showed solid green, and glittered with the sunlit emerald leaves of the arums, that had now risen above and concealed their ill-smelling mottled red blossoms.

Here and there on the hillsides the columns of pearl-gray smoke, wafted straight skyward, showed both the location of cultivated land where litter and brush were burning, and also that the wind was in abeyance, and the sun once more in power. The sky wore a misty veil over the blue, and the Moosatuk, rushing, foaming, and overleaping itself in its spring-running seaward, drew more from the ground for colours than of the sky reflections. Now and again an uprooted tree would be swept by, turning and stretching its bare arms upward, as if giving signals of distress, and then a log would plunge along, striking against the submerged rocks, rearing, and plunging again like a gigantic water snake.

Yes, in deed and in truth, life had returned to the River Kingdom at the sound of the voice of the waters, and yet throughout all the wide expanse the only human touch was in the field below, where a man, who cast a Titan's shadow behind him, was driving a plough

into the deep, cool soil, slowly shattering the stubbly hillocks of last year's corn. Calmly he worked, but with finality. The reins that guided the horses hung loose about his neck, for he only made use of them at the turnings, while the motive power seemed to come less from the horses than from the shoulders of the man who kept the ploughshare true in its course.

Brooke Lawton stood spellbound. For the first time she saw and comprehended the most primitive labour of primitive man, and it appealed to every sense of her body, — the mental, spiritual, physical, — appealed to her as had the freshly baked loaves, by its symbolism as well as directness, for beneath the leavening development of generations, side by side with the temperament for music expressed in rhythm and colour defined by pigments, walked another Brooke, the primitive woman.

Ah! if she could but fix and paint the scene as she felt it! Instantly the ploughman stood as the rightful ruler of the River Kingdom, and dominated it. It was not the personality of the man, for she had not yet seen his face, merely his fitness to his surroundings. Enoch Fenton's voice broke the spell: "A slow worker, as I told your ma (I put in my mare with your horse, it's too heavy for one), but that don't signify in share farmin'; you won't hev to watch out sharp until the harvestin', and then I'll help you out. If you was

left to yourself, you might fare like that pretty city Widder Harris, down to the Forks; she let old Ed Terry keep her cow fer half the milk. Firstly the cow was dry, and Mis' didn't get any of course; time went along, and the cow calved, and after a week Mis' Harris went across lots with her kettle fer her milk.

“‘There's no milk due you,’ said old Terry, chuckling. ‘How's that?’ says she, mad-like, ‘I'm to get half, and I saw you take in a full pail this morning.’ ‘That's all true,’ says he, ‘half comes to me, and your half goes to the calf!’

“Not that I expect this chap is that kind; he's sort o' mild and solemn, that's why I chose you a foreigner; the native is often overcrafty to work with green women folks that ain't had the picklin' experience gives. There's fellers round here would sell you cold storage eggs for settin' as quick as not. I know 'em, and bein's you're a friend o' Dr. Russell, wife and I feel a charge to look after you a spell. Now 'f it was Keith, she's different — no cold storage eggs for her! Do you hear when the weddin's coming off? That's the only bargain of hers I mistrust. The sharpest women on general trading most allers slips up on matrimony. I've often said to ma, when it comes to matrimony, I think the Lord loves and favours women best that, when they sets their mind on a poor sinful

man, jest closes their eyes, and topples right into marriage without bargaining.

"Old Terry was a corker! 'twas he that was mowin' fer me one day, and I says at the nooning, 'Will you take rum and water, or cider?' Says he, 'As the rum's handiest, I'll take that while you're drawin' the cider!'

"Hi there, Henry! Henry! halt at the turn!" he called to the ploughman as they reached the field edge. "It's good he understands English, and speaks it only a little back-handed. What's his other name? Let's see — Petersen? no that was the one that wanted a steady job. Yes, I remember, it's Maarten, — they spell it with double *a* where he comes from.

"This is Miss Lawton you're agoin' to halve the crops with, and bein' as it is she expects you'll measure full and fair, and something over, and she wants you to remember that I'm standing by her, and my eye teeth is cut!"

"Why, I didn't tell you to say that, deacon. I'm sure Mr. Maarten will be fair," stammered Brooke, feeling personally embarrassed at the implied lack of confidence, and oblivious of the wink that her agricultural preceptor had given her, for he had simply wished to show the newcomer that she had a protector; while she stood there colouring with distress, her hand half raised, not knowing whether she was to greet the farmer, as she had made a point of doing their

neighbours, or keep the reserve that belonged to the city service of inferiors.

As for the man, he stood quite still, one hand on the plough, the other lifting his wide hat by the crown in greeting, an act of politeness no country yokel would have vouchsafed. What he said she could not hear, but the single glance he gave her, though interrupted by the shadow of his hat, tinged with a swift respect instead of lingering curiosity, she read as an appeal for fair trial and mercy for his awkwardness, so her outstretched hand dropped to the stone wall that divided them. Leaning on it, she asked some trifling questions that could be answered by a brief yes and no, to put him at his ease, then strolled on again along the field edges, only half listening to what Enoch Fenton said of the best rotation of crops for soil somewhat overfarmed, and half busy with her own thoughts, quickened in a dozen different ways by the impulse of spring.

"New man don't seem sociably inclined to women folks," said the deacon, with a chuckle; "funny he should be took that way too! Most as dumb and offish as Silent Stead up there on Windy Hill, though Stead's thawed out considerable toward 'em, ain't he, since you folks come here?" he added, in a persuasive tone intended to open further possibilities of conversation.

"Oh, that is not because we are women folks," answered Brooke, simply, smiling at the old man's eagerness; "it is also because of Dr. Russell, who introduced us. We are strangers, and lonely like himself, and you know he is teaching my brother, so that he may not wholly lose sight of college, and of course we are very grateful for that."

"Want ter know!" was the enigmatical reply, the non-committal answer of the countryman, given as it always is with the falling inflection, though the words imply a question.

As they turned again toward the cross-road, the head of a man and horse could be seen above the leafless wild hedge that covered the fence. It was Robert Stead, and as he caught sight of Brooke, he pulled some letters from his saddle-bag and waved them toward her.

"As you're likely to have company home, I reckon I'll cut across lots," said Enoch Fenton, dryly, noticing her eagerness, for letters always opened a realm of possibility, while the deacon's query about Keith West's marriage reminded Brooke that she had not heard from the prospective bride for nearly a month, and so she had unconsciously hurried her steps.

When she reached the bars (four rough chestnut poles held by old horseshoes driven into the posts like staples, — the relic of an old country tradition

to keep the distemper from the cattle pastured therein), Stead had already dismounted, and stood waiting for her, and saying, "Letters first," handed her the package — six in all: two for her mother, one being in the writing of Mr. Dean, and one of the lawyer; one from Lucy; two in strange hands, and the last addressed in the square, upright characters that she had seen once before, this also readdressed by Charlie Ashton.

With a swift movement she dropped them into the pocket of her brown linen pinafore, and, turning backward toward the Moosatuk, let the beauty of the vista — which at that point was framed by the mottled trunks of two gigantic plane trees that linked their gnarled branches across the roadway — take the place of speech for a few moments.

"Then you too love the river, and turn to it as I do," Stead said, watching her face, and attributing its changeful expression, now wrapt, now alert, to its influence.

"Yes, surely," she answered, looking far off and beyond, "and I think I must have known it somewhere in dreams, perhaps before ever I saw it. You do not know that when I was only a child I christened all over there, as far as eye can see, my River Kingdom, and said that some day I would be fairy queen of it!"

"Yes, I know; Dr. Russell once told me of your gypsying, — and now?" Stead dropped Manfred's

bridle that he had been holding, and drew a step nearer to the young woman, while the horse, feeling his liberty, began to crop the tender tufts of grass that were growing between the wheel tracks. "Is it not still your kingdom?"

"Yes and no. The kingdom is still there, but fairy days have flown away with their kings and queens, and all of that; it is only a corner of the same big round workaday world, though an enchanted one, and I am only just one woman in it, not even a gypsy queen. The river alone has not changed: when I am quiet, it soothes me; when I am restless and dissatisfied, it moves for me and cools the fever. This winter, when it was frozen and buried, I too felt turned to stone at times, or as if I stood by watching the face of some one I loved who was dead. If the ice had lasted another month, I do not think I could have borne it," and Brooke, as she gazed, clasped her hands before her with a gesture half supplication, half resolution, that had always been peculiarly her own.

Then Stead saw that the hands, with the firm, but slender fingers that tell of the artistic temperament, were no longer white and rose-tipped, but roughened and seamed like the ground itself with the stress of the winter,—the patient hands of the woman who works, not of the queen who toys.

Suddenly the frost wherein his heart had been encased,

numbing him all these eleven years, melted in the sunshine of her simple, wholesome womanliness, and broke away with a swift wrench, like the ice of the river in the force of the freshet. The red blood pulsed anew and sang in his ears the eternal spring song that was all forgotten, or worse yet, disbelieved; for a single moment it swirled him about, and hurried him along, struggling uselessly, backward toward youth, — a perilous journey.

Manfred, who had cropped all the grass within easy reach, now nibbled sharply at his master's pocket for sugar; with an impatient gesture Stead turned — and the moment passed; while Brooke, once more sweeping the landscape with her gaze, slowly stretched out her arms toward it unconsciously, and began to climb the hill again. The last detail of it all that lingered in her memory was the ploughman following in the furrow that his strength made true, and as the two walked slowly homeward, the ploughman in his turn stopped, and, lifting his hat to cool his head, stood watching them.

Robert Stead stopped at the barn to show the Cub, now in the first enthusiasm of the coming trout season, how to repair an old rod of his father's that had grown brittle from disuse, and Brooke carried the letters to her mother, reading that from Lucy; but she took the one marked Overveen to her own room presently, where, sitting by the window, she opened it slowly.

It held a single sheet that bore these words —
random verses from the “Lost Tales of Miletus,” care-
fully copied — no less, no more!

But haunted by the strain, till then unknown,
Seeks to re-sing it back herself to charm,
Seeks still and ever fails,
Missing the key-note which unlocks the music —

* * * * *

“They gave me work for torture; work is joy!
Slaves work in chains, and to the clank they sing!
Said Orpheus, ‘Slaves still hope.’

“And could I strain to heave up the huge stone
Did I not hope that it would reach the height?
There penance ends, and dawn Elysian fields,
But if it never reach?”

The Thracian sighed, as looming through the mist
The stone came whirling back. “Fool,” said the ghost,
“Then mine at worst is everlasting hope!”
Again up rose the stone.

Holding the paper clasped against her breast, again
Brooke’s thoughts sought counsel of the river, but
now between her and it, a silhouette standing against
the water, on the slope below the ploughman guided
the horses to and fro unceasingly across the corn-field.

CHAPTER XIV

THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

APRIL flew by on the wings of the migrating birds, and it was almost the last week, that brought the fragile wind flower to the wood edges and the swallows to the old barn, before Brooke realized that the month had fairly begun. For not more relentless is the rush of the city itself than life on a farm in the springtime, when the power that drives is the vital force of Nature herself, while a day dropped at this time slips back beyond recall.

One morning, in herding a refractory hen, who had strayed with her brood out among the young oats, Brooke had found herself close by the spot where Henry Maarten was planting potatoes, and, half laughing and wholly out of breath, she called to him for help, which call he answered by catching the clucking, scratching hen, while she gathered the brood in her apron, and he followed her silently back to the chicken yard at a respectful distance.

Having put the chicks safely in a coop, Brooke pointed out a shorter way across the flower garden by which

Maarten might return to his work. Seeing that he paused by the straggling clumps of early tulips and daffodils that were already in bloom, and thinking they might be reminding him of some other garden for which he was homesick, she bade him gather as many as he wished, asked him if he was fond of flowers, and whether he would not like some roots, seeds, or cuttings for his little place, saying in a friendly way, to put him at his ease, for he always seemed to dread her presence, "They tell me you are painting and repairing to make a home at the Bisbee place for some one who is coming over in the autumn. Nothing is so homelike to a woman as growing flowers."

Pulling his hat over his eyes with a gesture of embarrassment rather than because the sun was bright, he said, in carefully pronounced musical English, with a decided foreign accent: "And they told you that I make a home for a sweetheart who comes? Yes, I had thought to; but if she comes not, what then?"

"But why should she not come? Surely she will if she has promised, and knows that you work for her," said Brooke, insensibly adopting his pronunciation and speaking with ready confidence in the faith of woman born of her own temperament.

"She has not promised it," he faltered, looking down at the tulips and again pulling his hat betwixt himself and his young questioner, as if he feared that if she saw

his eyes she might penetrate too far into his innermost feelings.

"She knows you are working for her?"

"No, not even that."

"At least she believes that you care?" persisted Brooke, too direct and sympathetic to realize at once that she might be probing a wound.

"I once dared to think so, but since I have come away, the word has travelled that perhaps her liking may be for another."

"Why, doesn't she know her own mind?" said Brooke, half to herself, all at once becoming the self-appointed champion of her farmer-on-shares, and not realizing until after the words had left her lips that she was herself too young a woman to be a safe adviser to so young a man, and she blushed hotly.

Turning to the flowers to aid her in an unforeseen situation by which she found herself much moved, she spied the great clump of white bridal roses, now putting out green shoots, that had spread from a single bush almost to a hedge, and which Miss Keith had pointed out in its winter leafless state as a much-cherished family possession. "Cut a root from this with your knife, carefully, for its thorns are long and sharp, and plant it by your porch, for the saying is that it brings luck to new homes," she said quickly. As she watched him she thought of the verses in her letter, and all

unconsciously repeated them half aloud, "'Then mine at worst is everlasting hope —'" but a sharp exclamation from the man, who with back toward her was tugging at the rose root, stopped her; his hand had slipped, and the sharp thorn pierced his thumb to the bone.

It was the pieman's day, and promptly at noon his cart turned into the barnyard. Mrs. Lawton, as well as Brooke, had come to look forward to the break made by his visits, for embodied cheerfulness must always be a welcome guest. This time, however, he was bustling with importance, and laid a pink envelope, with an embossed violet in the place of a seal, upon Brooke's lap as she sat on the porch step waiting for him to settle and unfold his budget.

The envelope contained a painfully written letter from his wife's sister, Sairy Ann, inviting Brooke to take the long-promised drive on the "Friday route," and pass the night at her farm, "to see the early birds in the morning." The sincerity of the invitation was so evident and the promised experience so tempting, that, after thinking it over a moment, Brooke went indoors to write an answer of acceptance, realizing that after the Sign of the Fox should be hung in its place there could be no holidays.

"Going, bean't you?" smiled the pieman, when she returned.

"Yes," she nodded gayly, "that is, if I can persuade Mrs. Peck to keep mother company. You see I have hunted far and wide for a young girl to help in our new venture," of which, by the way, the pieman most heartily approved, and had been heralding it like the most persistent advance agent along the entire course of both his town and country routes.

"Never mind, suthin' may turn up yet," he advised soothingly; "you've got a week to spare and the Lord can raise up a heap o' good as well as trouble in that time, and sometimes waitin' fer Providence after you've done your best is advisable, and not to be jedged like settin' and waitin' before you've done aught, and lean-ing, which is not faith, but the devil's yeast of laziness."

In the early afternoon, after the pieman had gone on his way, Brooke wheeled her father into the garden, while she planted the seeds of mignonette, bluets, sweet-sultan, and China pinks, and the second planting of sweet peas of Miss Keith's saving, in the long rows that she had advised, for now there would be a double reason for having jugs of fragrant flowers on the table of the honeysuckle-screened south porch, which Brooke had christened the Tea House.

Tatters was worried. Indoors he stayed by his master, outdoors he followed his mistress — under the present circumstances, what was his duty? First he licked Adam Lawton's hand persistently, and then followed

Brooke along the line she had carefully marked with stick and string, according to Stead's gardening instructions, until he was made to understand that his footprints in the newly turned earth were not things to be desired; then he returned to the chair.

There could be no question that physically Adam Lawton was in every way improving. The use of his hand was gradually returning, and with the aid of a cane he could move slowly from the bed to his chair; he could also play a game of checkers, and though he spoke slowly the words were finished, not broken as at first. Still his thoughts were of the past and lacked connection.

A sudden shower of potent April rain fell with sharp sound on Brooke's seed packages. Gathering them together hastily, she pushed the chair up the sloping platform through the kitchen door that had been widened, and as she did so the fishing pole that the Cub had mended fell clattering to the floor. Stooping to pick it up she noticed that it caught her father's eye, and as she held it toward him, he grasped it eagerly, saying softly to himself, "My new pole; to-morrow I'll go fishing, if Enoch Fenton will play hookey too."

The rain increased and by five o'clock had promised to settle into a steady pour that drew a curtain across the river, cut ruts in the roadway, and gullied the soft fields, — a class of storm dreaded in spring in a hillside

country, and entirely the reverse of the traditional growing rain.

The Cub came in and hung his coat to drip in the porch, and even the water that ran from Pam's grotesque and stubby tail made a puddle on the floor.

"I turned the cows out and shut the gate, because Mr. Fenton said I ought to from now on," said the Cub, looking at the rain, and then gauging the wind, as it tore downhill, like a veritable native. "I guess I'll go back and let 'em in again, just this once. No, I don't want an umbrella, it'll only go bust," he added, as he stepped out the door, closing it with much difficulty against the rising tide of wind and rain.

Brooke, who had proffered the umbrella, stood watching him through the glass half-door, and then a dark object coming up the cross-road drew her attention. At first she could not make out whether it was man or woman; then, while she was still in doubt, the screening umbrella broke loose from its fastenings and, turning completely inside out, showed that its carrier was a woman.

"Mother, please come here and see if you can tell me who this is struggling up the road. Can it be Mrs. Peck? She is the only human being hereabouts who does not keep a horse!" But the figure proved to be too tall and straight to belong to the widow, who not only had settled and gone to flesh, but was somewhat listed as well.

"When she reaches the house, whoever she may be, I would ask her in. It may be some one who has come up by the trolley on the lower road expecting to be met; better go and open the front door," said Mrs. Lawton, hastening to light the lamps, which were her special care.

Brooke started to act upon the suggestion, but as she gave a final look she saw that the woman had already turned into the barn lane, and, though evidently almost spent, was coming across to the kitchen door with a directness that betokened familiarity. So Brooke returned to the side door and, opening it a crack, held it against the racking wind. As the gust swept through the house, Tatters, who had been lying in the hallway, arose, gave a growl, then a sniff, and, with his tail beginning to swing in a circle, nosed open the door, in spite of his mistress's effort to stop him, and threw himself violently against the dripping figure coming up the cobbled path, who seemed to grapple with him.

"Back, Tatters! come back!" called Brooke, letting go her hold of the door, which swung back with a clatter, as she clapped her hands to attract the dog's attention.

"Down, bad dog! Why, he will tear the woman to pieces. Quick! blow the horn for Adam; I never dreamed he could act so!" cried Mrs. Lawton.

Brooke raised her hand to take the ram's horn from

its hook, still calling and whistling to the dog, whose actions seemed to be wholly unaccountable. As she looked, her hand dropped; the woman was hugging Tatters, not buffeting him, while at the same instant the wind gave her hat a final twist, breaking it from its moorings and carrying with it the short veil whose modish black dots clung soddenly, like concentrated tears, and the woman's face was revealed.

"It is Cousin Keith!" gasped Brooke, dashing into the rain to lend a helping hand, for the water-soaked skirts had finally wound themselves into a bandage around the poor woman's legs and effectually prevented her from lifting her feet to the steps, upon which she sank, chancing into the biggest puddle she possibly could have chosen.

Mrs. Lawton came to the door with hands extended, and a totally bewildered expression on her face, while the same ideas were crowding the brain of both mother and daughter. Had Keith West gone out of her mind, or had a letter telling of her coming miscarried, and was her plight wholly the result of not having been met and having miscalculated the strength of the storm? Probably by this time she was no longer Keith West, but Mrs. James White. If so, where was the First Cause? Had there been a railway accident, or had she been "abandoned at the altar," as the newspapers put such matters?

"No, not into the kitchen," expostulated Miss Keith, as Brooke would have led in; "let me stand here and drip a bit — that is, unless you can set down the little starch tub for me to stand in," she added, as a shiver went up her spine, making her teeth chatter.

"Nonsense, water cannot hurt oil-cloth, and you must go close to the fire while I take off these sopping things at once," said Brooke, decidedly, pushing Miss Keith resolutely over the threshold and closing the door, thinking, as she afterward said, that if she had a lunatic upon her hands, she must neither hesitate nor argue.

Meanwhile the Cub had returned from the barn and, throwing open the door, came upon the apparition of his tall and somewhat angular kinswoman, who three months before had gone away in such brave array, being rapidly divested of her outer garments by his mother and sister. Her sandy hair, usually trigly coiled about her crown, had fallen down and stuck to her face in gluey strings, suggesting, to his boyish fancy, seaweed clinging to the figurehead of some shipwrecked vessel that at last view had swept proudly from port, all sails set.

Giving vent to a long-drawn "wh-e-w," the Cub began to laugh; it wasn't nice of him, but the scene was irresistibly funny. Not a word was spoken, Miss Keith as yet offering no explanation whatever; and while

she managed to keep her usual poise, erect as a ramrod, she only moved her legs and arms to release or put on garments as Brooke guided, like a marionette. His laugh died away unheeded, and it was not until he whispered "What's up?" in a somewhat awe-struck tone in Brooke's ear that either of the women noticed him; and then Miss Keith gave a shriek, and snatching one of the stockings that Brooke had but just succeeded in peeling off, wrapped it around her neck, while Brooke said over her shoulder, "We don't exactly know, but won't you *please* go and stay with father and coax Tatters with you," for the dog was not a respecter of clothes, and his joy at seeing his old friend was more emphatic than convenient.

Seated in an arm-chair before the stove, enveloped in the Cub's striped blanket wrapper, her hair pushed out of her eyes, and her slippered feet resting on the oven ledge; Miss Keith looked about the kitchen and then at Mrs. Lawton, who had quietly taken a seat beside her as if expectant of some new sort of outbreak, while Brooke went for a stimulant, and mixing some whiskey and water, held it to the thin, teetotal lips, that at first sipped dubiously and then quaffed eagerly, as she felt vitality returning in the wake of the draught.

"Are you not better, and will you not tell us what has happened?" asked Mrs. Lawton, in the precise,

deliberate staccato speech by which the calmest people often show that they are nervous.

"Did you write us that you were coming? And why, pray, did you not take Bisbee's hack from the station, instead of risking such a walk in a storm like this?"

"Because I am a fool!" jerked Miss Keith; "I wanted to get here without being seen; I hoped you would let me hide for a few days until I could think out where to go and what to do! I came on the train as far as Stonebridge, and when I boarded the trolley it promised to clear off. If I'd taken Bisbee's hack, the talk of me would have been all over town and into prayer-meetin' to-night. This is Wednesday, isn't it?"

"No, Tuesday," replied Brooke, soothingly, exchanging an anxious glance with her mother, which as much as said, "Yes, the poor soul is deranged," while at the same time she was revolving in her mind how she could manage, without attracting attention, to send Adam for Dr. Love, a young physician of Dr. Russell's recommending, who had lately established himself in Gilead, hitherto the people of the River Kingdom having been obliged to send either to Stonebridge or Gordon. Swift as the glance was, Miss Keith, who was rapidly recovering herself, caught it in passing and, moreover, read its full meaning.

"I'm not crazy, nor coming down with typhoid, nor

flying from justice!" she announced in a tone of suppressed excitement that was far from reassuring. "In that I have proved scripture (not that it needed proving), my visit of the last three months has been a success. Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. My pride is gone and I have fallen —"

"Oh, Keith!" said Mrs. Lawton, faintly.

"In spirit, from my high aspirations," she continued, not heeding the interruption nor the sudden painful colour that suffused Mrs. Lawton's face. "Also a fool and his money are soon parted, likewise my money and me. So I am, as I said before, a fool, but one who would like a few days to review her folly before the minister and the neighbours feel called upon to wrestle with her about it."

Light was beginning to dawn upon Mrs. Lawton and Brooke, though as yet the clouds were by no means lifted.

"Would you not rather rest until after supper or have a night's sleep before you pain yourself by telling us? We do not wish to force any confidence, only naturally we feared that you were ill. Your room, by chance, was aired to-day, and the bed-making is only a minute's work," said Mrs. Lawton, rising and laying her hand soothingly upon Keith's shoulder, as a hint that she might perhaps like to retire, which would have been an unspeakable relief. Not she! Keith West's

nature, blended curiously as it was of Scotch and New England granite, was softest and most retiring in triumphant, happy moods, but in adversity, unsparing and unflinching.

"What I have to tell won't improve by keeping," she said by way of answer. "To begin with, I ought to have known better, after all my farming experience, than to buy a pig in a poke, a cow over seven, or a horse without knowing its age, and expect a bargain."

"You seemed to be having a delightful time in Boston when you last wrote," ventured Brooke, quietly, in an endeavour to hasten and focus the explanation, which, being epigrammatically expressed, acquired vagueness thereby.

"Yes, I did at first, until I found out that my friend Mrs. Dow was charging her car fare up to me when she took me about, and that her company, with which the house was so full that I had to take a third story back, were boarders, and I was charged double rates because I'd only come for what she called the 'cream of the season.' I didn't find all this out until the first month's payday, and then I overlooked it because I know learned men never get big salaries and I felt for Judith's pride. The next shock was that Mr. Dow, who I supposed was at the very least a professor or something in the museum and, as they say, 'counted an honourable position above high pay,' was only the

janitor! One day when I was out alone I called on him, and the door man said the only person of that name about the place was tending the furnace in the cellar. As I stood on the sidewalk, hesitating, wondering if I had mistaken the place, up popped Dow's head through the coal-hole!

"Why hadn't I guessed it before? I don't know why, except that you don't judge a man by his looks or his clothes in Boston, only by his language, and Mr. Dow certainly had a choice and entertaining flow. I meant to speak of it to Judith, but I let that pass by too. Thinking of being married so soon myself made me feel sympathy for a woman who wanted the man of her choice to appear to advantage. All the same I felt like shortening my stay as much as possible, and I wrote to James White to that effect, he replying by return mail. He said that only one thing stood in the way of his coming on the first of April, instead of waiting until May; a small mortgage of three thousand dollars was due on the farm, so that he must wait and arrange for it, as he wished to use the money he had in hand for our journey and improving the place to suit me. He hinted that money cost more out in Wisconsin than it does East, but he guessed that he'd have no difficulty in renewing the mortgage at ten per cent."

Here Miss Keith paused for breath, clenched her

hands, and set her teeth, as if taking a fresh grip on herself before she continued the confession. The expression on her face was that of a martyr, not only refusing to recant, but rather insisting upon punishment. This time, however, there was a third auditor, the Cub, who was standing in the hallway, concealed by the door niche, his rather small, deep-set, gray eyes fairly sparkling with mischief.

“As I said before, a fool and his money are soon parted, and here is where I parted from mine. I don’t excuse myself and say that I was overpersuaded, for I wasn’t — I was hallucinated and avaricious all in one. My twenty years’ savings, four thousand dollars, only drew four per cent in the savings-banks where I’d put it. If I took up that mortgage at seven even, I should really be owning my own home, favouring my husband, and being well paid for so doing, besides having something left over, for even then a long experience in peddling eggs had learned me not to put them all in one basket.

“So I wrote James White, and after a little of what seemed natural hesitation, he took my offer, told me how to forward the money, and said he’d bring the mortgage on with him, as it would be safer than in the mails. Also that he would be on in ten days and bring his youngest girl with him, as she was piney and he wanted her to see a Boston doctor, and she’d be company for

me if I felt strange in going back. He did write real considerate," and Miss Keith paused a moment, as if she could not yet wholly forget her hopes.

"I lived well at Judith Dow's those last ten days, — ice-cream every night and as much real clear coffee as I could drink; and Mr. Dow brought home three reserved-seat tickets to a Boston Symphony concert, but there was a blizzard that night and the electrics got fouled, so we didn't get there, which was probably lucky, as I now firmly believe he found the tickets in the street, or else in the museum, and the owner might have faced us down.

"Judith helped me with my shopping, and I was ready even to my bonnet (yes, that very one lying annihilated over there) the last week of March. James wrote that he would be on by the first week of April, and he was, the first *day*, as it chanced. It was just before supper that night when Judith came running up all those three flights of stairs and only had strength left to say 'they've come,' and ask me wouldn't I rather meet James alone before they all came in to tea, adding that her little niece was very weary and so she had gone to bed. I thought Judith looked rather queer and pale, but I laid it to the stairs and a weak heart, and having my new blue waist on, I went straight down.

"Judith opened the door of the parlour to let me pass, but as there was nobody in it but a lean old man with

a loose, close-shaven upper lip and chin whiskers, I backed out again, thinkin' she'd made a mistake, and James was in the livin' room where we ate; but she held the door, and I said, thinking she didn't notice, 'Mr. White isn't here!'

"'Yes, he is,' said she; 'James, this is Keith West, your affianced!'

"'You're not James White!' I said, getting as cold as clams, 'I have his picture; he is dark, and stout, and personable, with a heavy beard, and but a little turned of fifty!'

"'So I was, twenty years ago, when that picture was took,' said the horrid old man, grinning and wobbling his chin as he came forward, and before I knew what he was doing he put his arm around my waist.

"'How dared you both lie to me so!' I cried, turning to Judith.

"'I didn't send you any picture; it was sister,' said he.

"'I didn't lie — you deceived yourself, you never asked when the picture was taken! You are fifty and he was a grown man when you were in the primary,' said Judith, sharp as a knife. And when I came to think of it I never had thought of this, or worked out his age.

"'Give me back my money and I'll leave this house to-night!' I said, but even then Judith persuaded me to sleep over it and that things might look differently in the morning.

"They did — only worse — for that night one of the oldest boarders, a third cousin of theirs, crept in and told me that James White was already four times a widower, his farm being in a feverish sort of country, and that the girl — belonging to his second wife — who had come with him was really twenty, though she had never grown since she was ten, and had epileptic fits.

"I never slept a wink, but packed my trunks and slipped out for an expressman as soon as it was light, and moved to a woman's temperance hotel that I had noticed not many blocks away.

"James White and his sister followed me hot-foot after breakfast, and words passed on both sides, Judith doing more talking than her brother, who it then seemed to me was somewhat lacking and wouldn't have fought back without being egged on.

"I said that I would sue for my money, and she said that he would sue me for breach of promise, which he had in writing and signed plainly! I stayed at that hotel until yesterday, wrestling with my pride, and then I grew so homesick, the money I'd taken dwindled, and you know, Brooke, you said that you'd be glad to see me if I ever came back, and so here I am. I'll work my board out, if you'll let me, until I can look about and perhaps rent a little place and go to raise chickens — if only you'll forget all that I've told and not repeat it except to Dr. Russell. Just say I've changed my

mind, for if Enoch Fenton got hold of this there'd be no rest for me short of Middletown Asylum," and Keith, relaxing at last, began to sob just as she had the day that she had answered James White's first letter, using Tatters' head (he had stolen in again) for a pillow.

Both Brooke and Mrs. Lawton, remembering her kindly welcome home in their trouble, said all in their power to reassure her, and the younger woman gave her a rapid sketch of her new business plans, saying that if her hopes were realized fair pay would also be a part of the coöperative living. Something else she was about to add, for with all her sentiment Brooke was far-sighted, but her inborn delicacy stopped her, for the idea seemed harsh and brutal when put in words.

But the third listener read his sister's thoughts and did not hesitate. Striding into the room, he stood before his astounded kinswoman, towering above her, and said, with an apparently genial smile and hands in pockets: "I'll make a bargain with you, Cousin Keith, fair and square over the right. I'll forget all about your trip to Boston, and help you do the same, *unless* you forget that sister is mistress here, that I'm her backer, and mother the dowager duchess! In which case I shall *remember*, and with *trimmings!*" And strange to say, the boy's unasked championship was possibly the only thing that could have clarified the situation and made the coöperative household a possibility without embarrassment or bitter feeling.

CHAPTER XV

THE MASQUE OF SPRING

THE new dweller in the country longs for the coming of May as the only truly gracious month of the New England spring. In a few seasons, however, he learns to regret April, for when that month has gone, and the curtain fairly rises on the Masque of Spring, while it seems as if the orchestra is but playing the overture, and while yet he is watching the drapery curtain of leafage unfold, the throng on foot and wing pass by, all madly whirling to the pipe of Pan as they follow the voice of the ages that guides them to their breeding haunts, lo and behold! spring promise has merged in the summer of fulfilment.

It was Brooke's first knowledge of the coming of spring in wild nature. Spring in New York means a certain lassitude and enervation — the sun withers and the river winds chill alternately with exasperating inconsistency. The planted tulips put up their decorous heads in the parks at a certain date, much as the women in the streets don their flowery spring head-gear, — both are pleasing to the eye, yet there is nothing

spontaneous or unexpected about either; while to come suddenly upon a mat of arbutus or catch the silvery gleam of a mass of bloodroot transfiguring the silence of the woodland, where the leaves of a dozen winters, graduating to leaf mould, muffle the tread, is an event. So every night Brooke longed for the next morning and its surprises, and every morning she was eager for sunset and the night voices. Not that she wished time away, — far from it, — but to her its passing also meant progress, the nearing a certain goal.

Sometimes it seemed to her that in a previous existence she had lived the life of the River Kingdom; perhaps it was the heredity moulded beside the Highland torrents that sang to her in the voice of the Moosatuk. On this last day of April, as she stood at the edge of the pasture, with wands of delicate cherry bloom waving softly between her and the river, like heralds ushering one into the presence of a monarch, the words from the song of the migrant bird, "Out of the South," came to her lips, and she chanted them softly, watching the old horse holding a nose-to-nose conversation with a neighbour in the next field:—

"I have sought
In far wild groves below the tropic line
To leave old memories of this land of mine.
I have fought
This vague mysterious power that flings me forth
Into the north.

But all in vain, when flutes of April blow,
The immemorial longing lures me, and I go!"

Then, abandoning for the time the fight against the lure of a voice beyond her ken and a memory in which sweetness and pain were inextricably blended, she gave herself wholly up to the spell of the present.

Another happening that day lent wings to her spirit, though the thing was both practical and humble. Bisbee, the stableman, upon the strength of having seen the Sign of the Fox when it was at the blacksmith's being framed in iron (for the rings had not held), ordered a sign for his newly completed stable, offering the generous price (to him) of twenty-five dollars for it, he to furnish the wood.

"There's a regular horse painter over in Gordon will do me a race-horse in a sulky, driver included, for fifteen," said Bisbee, a big, jolly, liberal man, whose rosy cheeks plainly told that they were not made in New England; "but he's done that same one fer everybody within ten miles. Besides, what sense in a race-horse sign fer a family stable, say I? Give me something safe and assuring, yet not too safe!"

So Brooke had eagerly accepted the commission, for with the return of Keith West, two or three hours a day for work had become a joyful possibility, and she conceived the idea of painting the heads of two horses upon the sign-board he had sent up. One

must represent a staid family horse, and the other a more speedy roadster, and as she looked across the pasture, the natural position of the two gossips by the stone fence gave her the motive in a flash. If she only had the board there, she might sketch in the grouping at once, she thought, and the light also was exactly as she would wish it. The sign was in the barn, but it was too heavy for her to carry, and Adam had gone up to Windy Hill for the day, to do double work, as Robert Stead was expecting Dr. Russell to go on their annual trouting excursion to Stony Guzzle the next day. Well, there was no help for it, but still Brooke gazed about as if expecting help would fall from the skies or spring Jack-in-a-box fashion from the ground. It was the latter that happened, for at that moment the head of the farmer-on-shares appeared above the fence of the potato field, where he had just completed his task of planting, and was about to follow along the little brook to the road.

As Brooke hesitated to ask him to do an errand that certainly had nothing to do with farming, he paused involuntarily. Meanwhile Brooke thought, "I can surely ask it as a courtesy such as any man would do me," and said, "Good morning, Mr. Maarten" (she did not call him by his Christian name as she would have one distinctly in service, for instinct hinted to her that he might have been driven to his

present vocation by hard luck), "would you do me a favour?"

Instantly the tools and potato bag were dropped, but he did not take the advantage of coming nearer, as he might easily have done.

Then Brooke explained her need in the frank way she had of taking people into her confidence, yet without gush or familiarity, that had always been one of her charms; and Maarten hastened to the barn while she went to the house for her chalk and sketching stool.

In an hour, after several false starts, Brooke had compassed the grouping and outline, though there was one curve in the neck of the young horse that displeased her. Hearing the pïeman's whistle out on the road, and remembering that this was the day when she was to accompany him on his route to "Sister-in-law Sairy Ann's," and knowing that Maarten would naturally have gone home to his dinner, — for he never brought it in a pail like other labourers, her informant being Enoch Fenton, who said he table-boarded at the best place in Gilead, and paid six dollars a week, and most likely had a big head, — she was demurring as to how she should get the sign back, for to leave it might tempt the cows to lick the chalk off. At this point she became conscious, through one of those swift half glances that tell so many tales, that

Maarten was waiting a little beyond, and not only waiting, but watching her eagerly. Therefore, taking advantage of the circumstance, she laughingly apologized for asking two favours in one day, but would he carry the sign back to the little harness room, long disused, with a door of its own on the pasture side of the barn, where the sign could be kept free from hay dust?—adding, half aloud, as she took a final look at her work, “There is something wrong about the line of old Billy’s neck; it could not possibly twist like that.”

Point of view frequently has as much to do with our estimate of a thing as the value of the thing itself. Therefore Brooke’s progress of fifteen miles through the hill country in the pieman’s wagon brought her in touch with an entirely different side of the world of the woods than if she had driven over the same way with a party of guests who chattered inconsequently, or gone on horseback in the company of Stead, as she had done once or twice lately, for even the mild-mannered old horse required guiding and attention that banished the spirit of revery.

The pieman had covered his wares carefully, and rolled up the curtains all around, while the horse, dragging the loaded cart, proceeded perforce at a walk, so that Brooke, seated on a low chair, travelled with all the leisurely ease of an old-time queen in a

palanquin. This pace brought her close to every feature of the Masque of Spring, face to face with the reality of it, and she could anticipate, and then realize, every detail in its fulness.

Her charioteer also was as much a child of nature and a part of it all as the big gray squirrels that raced along the fence-tops, while his simple and positive faith in the goodness of all created things, and his intense love and kinship with the wild brotherhood, opened a new world to Brooke, banishing for the time all care and responsibility and replacing it with the wholesome pleasure of the hour, born of the pure joy of mere living. When one has known trouble, and then felt this touch of peace, is it not the new Revelation of God, fitted to meet the needs and greeds of to-day, even as nineteen centuries ago the single-hearted Messenger brought his spiritual message to the material Oriental world?

They would travel a mile, perhaps, in entire silence, the pieman merely pulling up now and then, and pointing with his whip to a warm spot, where a group of silver-green ferns slowly unfolded and stretched their winter-cramped paws, or else, with finger raised, caution silence while the song of some elusive bird thrilled the air, — "Whitethroat," "Fox-sparrow," or "Oven-bird," being his only words. Then a settlement of half a dozen houses, and a period of bustle, barter,

and exchange of news would interrupt, and so on until, as the "peepers" began to tune up, and the sun called the warmth of the day swiftly after him, they turned into Sairy Ann's yard.

After a keenly relished supper, Brooke and her guide stole out to the edge of a strip of woods that separated some grass meadows from a brawling trout stream running its downhill course a dozen miles before the Moosatuk received it. There, seated on a log, they waited as the twilight began to cast its mysterious spell. Presently a strange cry sounded through the gloom, was repeated, and echoed by others a second and a third time. Next a rush of wings, as if a bird was flung suddenly into the air, opening its wings at the same time. A sharp whirring sound followed, increasing as the wings that made it vanished skyward. Bending forward to watch the wonderful flight, until eye could not see it, in a moment Brooke was startled by the falling as of a bolt from the clouds close beside her, followed by a sweet musical whistle.

"First one's down again, — see, he's doin' it over!" said the pieman, and the call and lunge were repeated as before. But this time the girl's eye did not follow; the wonder and rush of it all was thrilling her from head to foot. She had seen the sky-dance of the woodcock, the free Walpurgis night's festival of the American river woods, with wild flowers for bracken and hem-

lock boughs for witches' brooms. Once more her toes tingled, music rang in her ears, sorrow and love both slipped away, and she was again the little girl playing at gypsy queen in her River Kingdom. That night Brooke slept deeply, but it was the sleep of dreams that comes from being drowned in a "best room" feather-bed for the first time, an experience both fearful and wonderful.

Instead of starting on his return trip at seven the next morning, as usual, the pieman's advice was asked by his widowed relative concerning the buying of a cow, which was to be sold at auction that morning in the next village. For this one day at least Brooke was in no haste, and as the auction began at nine o'clock and was two miles distant, the pieman suggested that she might like to spend the time in the woods that they had skirted the previous night, and walk along the stream. Then, when she had gone as far as she chose, all she had to do was to follow the brook north again without fear of going astray, while by way of a lunch Sairy Ann gave her half a dozen mellow russet apples, the storing and keeping of which, in prime condition, well into the summer was a matter of great pride.

Nothing could have suited Brooke better than these few hours of perfect liberty, — she was responsible for nothing about her, not even for her presence there. The widow's hens were cackling vigorously, and she

laughed as she realized that, whether they broke their eggs or stole their nests, it was a matter of indifference to her. The revulsion from the tense responsibility of the past three months flew to her head like the subtle May wine of the Old World, her heart beat fast, she stretched her limbs, and then began to thread the woods toward the stream in a delicious waking dream.

Being guided by sound, she stood looking at the bits of drift that swirled by, the water drawing her eyes and holding them as a mirror does those who are near it.

In a few moments she noticed that, while there was a distinctly marked path among the rocks and stones along her side of the watercourse, the opposite bank was heavily brushed and almost impenetrable, while the sunlight came filtering through and danced upon the water in a way that entranced the artist in her. Choosing a mossy stump, and being thirsty, for the first thirst of spring is more keen than any that follows, she seated herself, buried her shoe tips in the deep moss, and taking an apple from her pocket bit into it deliberately, critically watching the juice ooze from the wound her teeth had made. As she munched, gazing at the sunbeams chasing the shadows over the water, she was startled by a ringing sound, as of metal striking stone. It was repeated several times before she located its direction, and as she did so, saw that the

noise was made by the shoes of a horse, who was coming downstream, browsing along the foot-path, in the line of which she was seated.

A second glance showed her that it was Manfred, Stead's horse, with bridle fastened loosely to the saddle, while a fishing basket attached to one side easily explained his presence. Seeing Brooke, he came quickly toward her with a friendly whinny and nosed the apple. Almost at the same time Robert Stead himself, in the water to the knees, slowly wading the somewhat treacherous shallows, and whipping the stream as he came, appeared from under the arch of overhanging hemlocks.

For a moment he did not seem to believe the sight of his own eyes, and then, rapidly reeling in his line, he looked out for the nearest landing spot and stood before Brooke, with an expression that might be interpreted either as one of surprise or resentment at having his sport thus interrupted. But then he had acquired a stern expression by practice. Brooke had often before thought he wore it as a mask, and his words were not angry, but almost playful.

"Eve, the apple, and a bit of Eden! But how did you come here and what are you doing?"

"*Not* Eve, because, as you will observe, I am not going to offer my apple to the only man in sight, but share it with a good sensible horse, who will not tell

tales. I came up to the farm last night with Mr. Banks, the pieman, to see the woodcock dance, and I'm waiting here while he buys a cow for Sister-in-law Sairy Ann. As to what I am doing, I *was* eating an apple, but Manfred interrupted me; and now I'm going to begin another, and I'm very sorry that your simile prevents my offering one to you, — for they're good," and Brooke took a bite from a particularly fine specimen, a mischievous glance following her words.

Stead tethered the horse a few yards away and, coming back, threw himself down on the clean hemlock needles beside her. He felt suddenly relaxed, tired he would have called it, as if rigidity and strength had mysteriously left him.

"And you?" continued Brooke, "I see of course that you are fishing, by the two small trout in the basket; but how do you come to be so far away from home at eight in the morning, when Adam said that Dr. Russell was to visit you to-day?"

"Because Dr. Russell came on the mail train last night and is now whipping the west branch of the stream; in this narrow cut we interfered, and we shall meet a mile below at Stony Guzzle in the course of an hour."

"Then you had better take to the water again, for I heard them saying last night that this stream takes two steps sideways for every one it goes forward,

and that gives you a three-mile walk plus fishing!" said Brooke, with a perfectly frank unconcern that piqued the man to natural contradiction.

"Thank you for your prudent advice, but I would rather sit here, for once simply because I wish to, and trust to Manfred's hoofs for catching up with the doctor!"

"Do you not always do what you wish?" asked Brooke, surprised at his changing mood, and feeling her way.

"Do you suppose that I can wish to lead the idle sort of life I do?" he asked quickly, looking up at her to compel a direct answer. "It is only because I have not a motive strong enough to make me break away, and desire of action is dead; but is that doing as one wishes?"

"Oh, I thought you loved it here at Gilead, and could not be happy out of sight of the river — I — at least that is — what I made of what Dr. Russell said," stammered the girl, astonished at his vehemence in contrast to his usual deliberation.

"I do not know what he has said, — nothing unkind, that I warrant; but he does not know — no one does. Listen, Brooke, for I am minded to do what I have never done before — put my burden on some one else by sharing it, and tell you the real reason why I am as I am, which has never before passed my lips in

words. No, you must be patient and listen," he said, for Brooke had made a sudden movement as if to rise. Stead did not realize that he was perhaps spoiling the girl's holiday; self-centred he was, at base an egotist, though an unconscious one; and to the fact that he regarded everything at the point where it touched himself could be laid the pith of all his unhappiness.

"Why do I tell you? I do not know, except that in all these years since, you are the first woman I have met whom I think would understand and who is also young enough to have mercy, and it is a matter for woman's judgment. Yesterday a letter came to me from an old friend in my profession, asking me to overlook a bit of bridge work for him for a month or so in early summer, while he takes some needed rest. At the end he tells me of his plans for work, urges me to join him, and gives me what he words as 'a last call back to life.' All this has stirred up the sources of a stream I thought long dry; instead of putting it away, as I once did, as something done and gone, it tempts me, and I am strangely all at sea. I feel as if I only need some one in whose sincerity I could believe to say, 'Go back to work,' and I should go."

"And leave the River Kingdom?" asked Brooke, looking up in alarm, her first thought, it must be said, being of the Cub's schooling. "We should miss you so."

Stead's eye brightened, and taking her hand that was not busy with the apple and rested on the stump, he held it between his own. He himself did not analyze his motive, simply it gave him comfort and secured her attention. Then he said earnestly, solemnly it seemed to the girl, from whose eyes the merry banter of a few minutes before had passed, "Listen, Brooke, brave woman, who is fighting out her own problems to the shame of others such as I.

"When I was turning thirty and engineering a railway through a mountain region of the south, I met and loved a woman as heartily as a man may, but the passion seemed one-sided. She had given me a final answer, and I was preparing to go away, as gossips whispered there was 'some one else,' when the next day she recalled the no and made it yes.

"I was almost beside myself with surprise and joy, and after a brief month we were married, for my work was ended and I was going North. For ten years we led a charmed sort of life, a little girl soon coming to share it with us. We three, with José always as attendant, travelled wherever my work lay, sometimes living in houses, sometimes in tents, but always happy. Then the first grief came to me (it is nearly twelve years since) — my little Helen died, down near Oaklands, where we were summering. The illness came like a shot in the dark, without warning, and Dr. Rus-

sell, whom I then met for the first time, was powerless.

"After this my wife began to droop and grew sadder day by day. This was natural except for the fact that she sought to be alone and avoided me, until one day in a fit of bitter melancholy she told me the secret that had lain between us like a sword all through those married years.

"When I had first met her she had a lover, a wild, hot-blooded, handsome fellow of the south mining country, — for him she refused me! At the same time, unknown to her, he had committed a crime and the law was on his track. He took refuge, as they thought he would, in her vicinity, and she was watched to see if she would take him food or shelter him. To foil them she betrothed herself to me, and thus disarmed, the watchers left, and her lover escaped scot free."

"But why didn't she go too, or follow him?" interrupted Brooke.

"Because what she called her sense of honour forbade her, and she never meant that I should know, — she was willing to pay the price of the scamp's life with her peace of mind."

"How she must have loved him!" said Brooke, tears trembling in her voice; "I don't see how she could have lived it down. To save the man you love by

marrying another, even if it was the only way — oh, I am not brave enough to do such a thing, and so I must not judge her!”

For a moment a startled expression crossed Stead’s face, as if this side of the matter had never occurred to him; but again self conquered.

“Do you wonder that I cannot forget, and that nothing seems worth while when I know that in those years of seeming happiness I was the companion of a woman whose heart was never mine; who played her part to me, until the child’s death broke the capacity? Whom can I trust after that?”

“I do not think you could have really loved her as you thought,” said Brooke, looking at him simply with deep, quiet conviction in her voice, “for if you had you would have at least understood her. And at the worst I should think you would have flown to work instead of away from it.”

“It may be that you are right,” Stead said, after a long pause, in which the thoughts of both travelled far, but in different directions; “I have a mind to try, but I shall never go away permanently from the River Kingdom. Child, child! how strange it is that your words should have been so long on my lips before ever I met you! Will you wish me luck for a motive, if I go in June?”

“Yes,” answered Brooke, wondering about the time of day, for the shadows had shifted greatly.

"And be glad to see me when I return?"

"Of course," said Brooke, frankly; then, as other words struggled on Stead's lips, blocking each other by haste, the pieman's bell warned her that he had returned and was ready to start. Giving the last apple to Manfred, she freed her hand, stretching it vigorously, for it was almost numb, sent a hasty message to Dr. Russell, and fled out into the open.

Robert Stead waited motionless for several minutes, looking after her; then, shaking himself as a horse does after a period of standing, he led Manfred to the wood road below, and prepared to make up for lost time. Yet for some strange reason he did not give the girl's message to Dr. Russell, neither did he vouchsafe any explanation of the fact of there being only two trout in his basket, or prate about "fisherman's luck" when the enthusiastic doctor showed ten beauties bedded in wet moss.

There was enough light left on Brooke's return for a survey of house, garden, and barns. It is strange when one goes away but seldom, that to find everything in place on the return and people doing as usual comes as a certain surprise. She opened the door of the old harness room to peep at her sketch of the horses. After a careful survey, she said to herself, "It is certainly true that one cannot judge work justly at the time it is done. Yesterday the neck of the young horse

seemed all awry, but to-day it has exactly the toss and turn I was striving for."

As she closed the door she glanced down over the fields, but neither man nor horse was there, only a convocation of crows sitting on the fence. The pieman would doubtless have maintained that they were discussing among themselves the probable location of this season's corn-fields.

CHAPTER XVI

THE WAY THE WIND BLEW

HOWEVER anxious the wife of Senator Parks had been to impress herself upon New York society, she experienced a delightful sense of relief when the winter of her novitiate was ended. Furling her banners of tactful triumph, she left town immediately after Easter, thereby doing the correct thing and following her own mood, a combination of rare accomplishment.

Many times during the season she had thought of the Lawtons and missed Brooke sorely from the circle of bright young women in their "third and fourth winters," whom she had the good sense as well as the attraction to draw about her; but the swirl of the pool had been so insistent that she had done little more than to send Brooke one or two cordial, if inconsiderate, notes of invitation to visit her, which of course had not been accepted.

Now that she had moved to the famous Smythers place at Gordon, and found her early passion for outdoor life and her developed taste for luxury at once sufficiently satisfied by its beauty and stimulated by its possibili-

ties, she desired the companionship of some one of taste, a friend and not a timeserver, with whom she could discuss her plans. Immediately her mind reverted to Brooke Lawton, and knowing from Lucy Dean that Gilead was within driving distance from Gordon, she set out in her victoria one exquisite afternoon toward the end of May to locate Brooke. Visiting Mrs. Parks was an elderly New York matron, Mrs. Van Kleek, of particular social importance, who was anxious to run over to her own cottage, recently built in Stonebridge and not yet open for the season, in consequence of which this drive, having a double mission, began immediately after luncheon.

Both coachman and footman, being new importations to the hill country, knew even less about the upper and lower turnpike and maze of cross-roads than did their employer, who had a general idea of the region. It seemed an easy matter to keep the river in sight, and yet the constant desire of the ladies to follow up each pretty lane, with its delicate fringe of wild flowers or drapery of catkins, kept luring them away from it at right angles; so that five o'clock in the afternoon found the sweating horses, as yet unused to anything longer than the drive through the park to Claremont and return, toiling wearily uphill on the upper pike just above Gilead, facing the way in which they desired not to go, but had accomplished by looping about in a figure eight.

The coachman was growing momentarily more anxious lest the horses should break down; the footman was bored and cramped with long sitting; both ladies were weary, quite talked out, and longing for their afternoon tea; while Mrs. Parks was also exasperated at the failure of the excursion.

"Stop a moment, Benson, and let Johnson ask that man in the field yonder if we are on the right road to Stonebridge, and if there is any place near where we can rest," she said finally. Benson pulled up as well as he could on the incline; Johnson dismounted and interviewed the farmer and, returning with a disgusted expression, said, "Stonebridge is six miles downhill, the way we've come up, mum, and if you please Gilead is that village a mile and a half back, mum, we passed a bit ago. This 'ere is the hupper road, the one in the dip below follows the river easy from Gordon to Stonebridge, and he says we'd best get on that."

Mrs. Parks demurred a moment, and while she did so Benson, whose word was law in all matters concerning the Parks' horseflesh, turned on the box and, touching his hat, said in a tone that was not to be contradicted, "Mrs. Parks, mum, we must keep on the way we are going, facin' with the wind until we can get to a flat spot where I can blanket my horses and rest them a bit. I'd not take the risk of turning them against that chill river breeze in their present sweat."

Both ladies understood stable ethics, and the moods of husbands when these same are disregarded, too well to object, and so a drive that would not have been abandoned for anything else was reversed by the mere blowing of the wind.

Reaching the beginning of the plateau by the West homestead, Benson had the tact to choose a spot for blanketing the horses where the cross-road opened Brooke's favourite river vista to the ladies in the carriage.

"How beautiful!" mumbled Mrs. Van Kleek, drowsily, her dry tongue cleaving to the roof of her mouth.

"It would be if we could only have our tea," sighed Mrs. Parks. "I declare I must have an outfit of some kind adjusted to this carriage, for I'm devoted to driving, and every one says that it is the great feature of this hill country, and of course there isn't a place around here where they know what tea is."

Johnson, who had been reconnoitring with an eye to a well, returned at that moment. "Hup yonder, mum, there's a neat house, mum, and a sign of a fox hangs by the gate, mum, quite like the old country, only it says 'TEA' instead of hale, mum."

"Tea on a sign-board here in the backwoods! Lead the horses a little farther up, Benson, and Johnson, do you go in and ask what we can have," — turning to Mrs. Van Kleek, "I don't suppose the tea will be any

good, herbs or old hay, but at least it will be wet, and perhaps hot, and I'm beginning to feel the evening chill in the wind. I wonder why no one has the sense to have a good tea place hereabouts, like the English tea-gardens, where they would put up sandwiches for fishing and touring parties and all that. They could make a fortune in the season, I'm sure."

"Here's the bill of fare, mum," said Johnson, returning and presenting the card; "a most genteel place, mum, though they've no license for spirits. Everything made fresh to order, mum, and in fifteen minutes. Besides what's there, mum, there's ginger hale and club sody, and will you 'ave it 'ere or go on the porch, mum?"

"Mrs. Van Kleek, will you look at this!" ejaculated Mrs. Parks, laying the card upon that lady's lap as if she had suddenly been presented with a patent of nobility.

"Printing, get-up, prices, quite like Tokay's! We will decide quickly, lest the thing prove an illusion and vanish as we near it, Cheshire-cat fashion. Johnson, we will have a pot of tea for two, with cream, and half — no, a dozen lettuce and chicken sandwiches, served out here. Also you may get ginger ale and cheese sandwiches for Benson and yourself," for Mrs. Parks owed much of her social success, as well as happiness in life, to the fact that she recognized the equal primal neces-

sities of all classes, and she argued that if Mrs. Van Kleek and herself, seated at ease in the carriage, were thirsty beyond endurance, Benson and Johnson on the box must be doubly so.

In due course the man returned, and turning up the flap seat in front of the ladies, placed the tray, with its dainty array, upon it.

"Damask napkins, instead of paper!" gasped Mrs. Van Kleek.

"Real cream!" said Mrs. Parks, "and domino sugar!"

"English breakfast tea, smell the aroma! a pot with an inside strainer, and porcelain cups and saucers!" continued Mrs. Van Kleek, proceeding to pour the tea, after which the remarks of the two women turned into a veritable patter song of praise, punctuated by sipping and munching.

"Really, this is most extraordinary! I wish I could tell of what those plates remind me; I seem to have seen the pattern before. Ferns, and no two bits quite alike, — it's not at all like the usual commercial china," said Mrs. Van Kleek, sinking comfortably back among the cushions, after finishing two cups of tea, together with five of the delicate sandwiches, and still looking meditatively at the sixth, murmuring, "Tokay could not outdo this, they are of the best — and the tea — simply unique!"

"Johnson," called Mrs. Parks, for the two men were eagerly regaling themselves at a respectful distance, "take back the tray and see if they can change this bill — and Johnson, was there a waiter or any one there who should have a tip?"

"I should jedge, mum, there was one elderish party who should; she was rather snappy, mum, and charged me not to break the ware; but the others are gentle-folks, mum, quite through, and said as of course I'd be careful, which of a certain I would, mum, and me bein' in service, mum, where I'd always known real china from Liverpool, and plate from pewter, which they 'ad the eye to see, mum," and Johnson walked off, bearing the tray as carefully as if it held family plate.

"Wait a minute," Mrs. Parks called after him; "ask if they can put me up fifty sandwiches, some of each kind, for ten o'clock to-morrow, and pack them in a box, and if they know where a family named Lawton live hereabouts, — the Adam Lawtons." Then to Mrs. Van Kleeck, "The Senator is going to take those four old California chums of his, that come to-night, trout fishing somewhere up this way to-morrow, to a place called Muzzle Guzzle, or some such name. I wished to send a nice luncheon out in the bus with the camping stove and the under cook to have it hot for them, but no, the Senator has ordered sandwiches — plenty of sandwiches, with Scotch and soda. They are to be driven

only to the foot of the hills, and then walk for the rest of the day. He says they want to forget who and where they are for once, — be boys and all that sort of thing, you know, — so if I could get the soda and sandwiches here it would be quite delightful.

“How long he stays! I believe I will go in myself and see to the matter, for my curiosity is quite piqued. Will you come? No — very well, I’ll not be gone a moment,” and Mrs. Parks, her delicate robes trailing behind her, crossed the dandelion-studded sward toward the house, with a swish and swirl of skirts, and a step as elastic as that of a young girl. Laugh, as has been the foolish fashion, at those women who come out of the West to receive the chill of eastern polish; yet they bring us a better gift than they take, that of buoyancy of heel, head, and heart that we greatly need.

Mrs. Van Kleek meantime adjusted her head, heavy with comfortable sleep, and gratefully entered the Land of Forty Winks, evidently for a protracted visit.

Hesitating as to whether front or side door was the legitimate entrance for wayfarers, and deciding upon the latter, Mrs. Parks, rounding the corner hurriedly, came face to face with Brooke, who was coming up from the garden bearing a great bunch of lilies-of-the-valley, while Tatters trotted beside her carrying a basket that held still more.

“Brooke Lawton at last!” and Mrs. Parks put out

her arms and, to Johnson's amazement, clasped Brooke, flowers and all, in a hug of spontaneous pleasure, that made the girl's heart beat quick for many a day, as she thought of it.

"Is this quaint, delightful place an inn as well, and are you stopping here?" queried Mrs. Parks, holding Brooke off at arm's length, first looking at her and then sweeping the surroundings with a comprehensive glance.

"No, it isn't an inn exactly," replied Brooke, mischief lurking at the corners of her eyes and mouth, "though I'm staying here. I am the Sign of the Fox, and this is my home! Now that you are here, pray come in and see mother, while I make you a bouquet from my very own garden in remembrance of the hot-house lilies you sent us when father was first ill."

"The Sign of the Fox! — you! how do you mean?" ejaculated Mrs. Parks, knitting her brows as if some one had asked her to guess a conundrum. "Ah, yes, then that was your *mother's* fern china and her brand of tea that we all used to rave over! Mrs. Van Kleek was recalling it only an hour ago — by the way she's out in the carriage (go tell her, Johnson, that Miss Lawton lives here and ask her to come in). But I do not yet quite understand."

"It is this way," explained Brooke, with an admirable self-possession, in which diffidence and independence

were equally blended. "We had the farm and a bit of money, but not quite enough to keep us; the life agrees with father, and may cure him. If Adam and I went away to earn more money, mother could not stay alone. Then I tried to think what I could do or sell here. People drive a great deal hereabouts; the hill country makes people hungry; therefore why not make and sell good tea and good sandwiches? And I think that you must have found them so," she added archly, looking at the empty plate upon the tray that Johnson had left on the serving table in the screened porch.

"Good! superlatively so! but why didn't you write me of your plan and let me exploit it and interest our own set? for you know that they are scattered all over these parts at some time of the year, either for the entire season, or between times, and before and after Newport and Europe. I would have done it with a will, I assure you, as I shall now with a megaphone voice, in spite of you!"

"I know that you would have, Mrs. Parks, and Lucy Dean wished to also; but what has happened, I think you must acknowledge, is best. I wanted people to find out for themselves, as you have done, and if they bought my wares, to do so because they are good and they need them, not because I sell them and desire their money. Otherwise the sun would very soon set on the Sign of

the Fox, instead of apparently beginning to rise. You know that it is the way of the world !

"But tell me; how did you come upon us? merely by chance? This must be a lucky 'red letter day,' for Lucy herself is coming to visit me to-night; Adam has already driven down to Gilead for her."

"Partly that, but chiefly because of the way the wind blew. You see we started for Stonebridge and circled about, not finding our mistake until we began to climb the hill below. By that time the horses were quite spent, and Benson would not turn back in the teeth of the river wind."

"It's no use, mum," said Johnson, returning, "Mrs. Van Kleek is sleepin' that 'eavy and 'appy it would take a brass band to wake her, mum," so the two women passed indoors, the fragrance of the lilies-of-the-valley lingering in the air.

When Mrs. Parks left, her arms full of flowers, a half-hour had sped by; but Mrs. Van Kleek, awaking with a jerk, was none the wiser for it, for one of Mrs. Parks's maxims was that it is always a mistake to apologize, save at the pistol's point, because it usually provokes irritation by calling attention to things that, ten to one, would otherwise pass unnoticed. As the victoria, following Brooke's advice, turned the corner toward the lower road, they met, coming up, a fat-stomached country horse dragging a rockaway, that pulled to the side of the narrow

cross-road to let them pass. In it, beside Adam, sat Lucy Dean, while the rear seat was heaped with hand-baggage; she waved gayly to Mrs. Parks, who would have stopped then and there for a gossip about the afternoon's events, but Benson, intent on making the home stretch, all deaf to her exclamation, kept his horses up to the bit, and soon the river road echoed their hoof-beats.

As to Mrs. Lawton, the visit, brief as it had been, did her untold good, besides giving her no feeling save of pleasure, thus bringing her for the second time naturally in contact with old acquaintances, without in the least destroying her peace of mind or making her doubt the wisdom of having broken away from the old life.

* * * * *

Brooke and Lucy always met with enthusiasm; indeed, one of the reasons for the stanch friendship of the two being the way in which they supplemented each other, thus allowing the character of both complete scope, without forcing either into the lead, except in matters conversational.

"I was so surprised and pleased when I knew that you would come, for the very evening after I wrote I saw in the *Daily Forum* that you were starting with your father on his car party to California. How did it happen that you changed your mind?" asked Brooke, leading the way to the little room next hers, for which Lucy had

begged, instead of the formal and unused best room over Mr. and Mrs. Lawton's, which some day was to be beautified, but at present harboured the dreadful black walnut furniture moved from below, in addition to smelling of wood soot and wasps.

Lucy threw herself into the arms of a fat rocking-chair that was covered with a cheerful bird-of-paradise chintz, and rumped her hair back from her forehead before she answered. So long was she about it that Brooke looked toward her apprehensively, fearing that the trip might have given her a headache; then she noticed that Lucy really looked tired, and that there was a lack of colour in her cheeks for which car soot could not wholly account.

"I did expect to go, and had planned out a delightful group of people for the trip, which, aside from pleasure as a side issue, was to explore and exploit a new bit of country that father thinks needs a railroad, and help convince his friends of that fact.

"*The Forum* offered to send Tom Brownell as the newspaper man of the trip, besides which two or three others we had chosen are always excellent fun, and Mrs. Parks was to be chaperon, at which she is a perfect success. She has the knack of always being on the spot, in case any one needs to prove or disprove an alibi, yet at the same time is totally oblivious; so Mrs. Grundy never has a chance to say a word, and every one is happy."

"Did you turn your back on such attractions to come to us?" said Brooke, deeply touched. Her feeling showed plainly in the look she gave Lucy, as after unpacking her friend's toilet things, she had dipped a sponge in warm water, and kneeling by her, began to bathe her forehead and eyes as gently as if Lucy had been a tired little child.

Lucy closed her eyes and gave a sigh of content at the touch of Brooke's fingers, but in a second opened them again, and looking straight at Brooke, replied: "No, I won't let you quite think that, though you know that I love to be with you and your mother. Some of the party turned their backs on me; first, Tom Brownell had himself replaced (I made sure through Charlie that it was his own doing) by a young westerner who, he said, 'knew the local ropes' better, and would be of greater advantage to the prospectors. Next Mrs. Parks decided that as *the* baby was teething she could not leave him for so long, in spite of having a separate maid for his head, hands, and feet, besides a trained nurse in perpetual residence.

"Then father suggested that little Mrs. Morton be invited in Mrs. Parks's place. You must remember her, — the Hendersons' cousin, a pretty, subdued little widow of about thirty, who puts people's houses in order and sees to the curtains and other interior decorations. She always looks as if she'd been cut out for a

good time, but fate has been rough to her, and though she is working hard to get used to it, a merry devil will look out of her eyes in spite of herself."

"Oh, yes, I remember. She redecorated your house as a surprise for you the season we were abroad, I believe," said Brooke, sudden illumination coming to her, for it had been openly whispered, early in the season, that Mr. Dean was ardently, if maturely, in love with Mrs. Morton, but that the little lady's peace-loving nature and hardly won independence, coupled with a fear of Lucy and her sharp tongue, stood firmly in the way of a very comfortable and suitable match.

"Yes, and father wished it done over again this winter, but I absolutely refused to be routed out in cold weather. Now I'd heard, as I know you have by your face, Miss Simplicity, that father was supposed to wish to marry the lady long ago, but that she was afraid of me. At first it pleased me to have her afraid; I revelled in it, also I thought that the idea would wear off with father.

"Lately I've changed my mind, and I think life is too good to live it alone, and that everybody ought to marry any one they wish to, provided the person does not have fits or inherit consumption. Then I went to father and told him so, and he was so pleased that he nearly made me cry, for though he always said that I was

everything to him, it wasn't quite true it seems; and he said that some day I would find out that he was not quite everything to me, and oh, Brooke, I really think I should like to!"

Brooke, who was still kneeling by Lucy, put her arms around her, and the two women, each having felt the mysterious throb of the woman heart that made them kin, rested a moment cheek to cheek.

Lucy recovered first, and shaking off the tender mood, tossed her head, the usual bravado returning to eye and lip as she said: "Next, I went to see Mrs. Morton and told her that so far as I was concerned the coast was clear, that I bore no malice, and that I hoped she and father would have a jolly old age (she is only six years older than I); but that I simply could not go on the car trip with them, though I would thank her not to announce it until after the start.

"She — well, she is a good sort, and I guess we understand each other, for she looked me straight in the face and said she hoped she'd have a chance some day to stand by me in return, and she didn't slop over or call me 'dear daughter,' or say she'd be a mother to me, for any grown woman knows that there is only one who can be that.

"Consequently society and Charlie Ashton think that I'm speeding to California, while in reality I've flown to you for protection against the blues, and I want

to stay a month if you will let me cook and do everything as you do — it is what I need. Who knows but I might turn farmer, or try love in a cottage myself some day.”

“A month, Lucy! oh, how good!” cried Brooke. “Yes, you shall do as we do, — you’ll really have to if business rushes as it has since we began, — but I’m afraid you will find it very dull, unless your fate dashes up in an automobile.”

“Dull! not a bit of it! Why, if I feel my flirting ability growing rusty, I can practise on the Cub’s elderly paragon, Mr. Stead, or try archaic sentiment on your big farmer man to console him for the sweetheart who has not yet materialized. From your ardent written descriptions of the landscapes about here, and the important places he always fills in them, it seems to me that he must be at least a straying Walther or a prince in disguise, seeking to be loved for himself alone.”

“Mr. Stead will probably be down to-night, so that you need lose no time in beginning,” Brooke made answer, flushing hotly. “We four have been playing whist a good deal, lately, and as I am not passionately fond of it, you shall take my hand. I think that you and he will prove pretty evenly matched in most things. As to my farmer, as you absurdly call him, you had better leave him alone, — it’s not worth while, — he

might misunderstand, take you in earnest, and embarrass you." Whereupon, after making the most cutting speech that Lucy had ever heard from her tongue, she turned about and went quietly downstairs, saying something about hurrying supper, as Lucy must be hungry as well as tired.

A new idea came to Lucy, born of her own teasing words, spoken wholly at random and in jest, and of Brooke's flushing. She had always thought Brooke wholly an idealist in affairs of the heart, and that whatever emotion she had ever been able to detect had been brought out by the artist Lorenz during their Paris sojourn. When it had apparently ended in naught she had been both disappointed and glad, the latter especially after Adam Lawton's failure, for after this she had desired Brooke, through matrimony, again to have the luxury and chance to enjoy her art that she thought her friend deserved.

When Charlie Ashton had drawn her attention to the resemblance to Brooke in the picture, "Eucharistia," she had expected developments, but now that nearly six months had passed she regarded the thing as a mere artistic coincidence, the lingering in the man's memory, perhaps, of a face for which he doubtless had a passing fancy.

Now a tangible possibility in the shape of Stead came into the foreground. Though Lucy had not seen the

man, the Cub had given him a glowing recommendation. As to his age, — Lucy was a woman of experience, — fifty might mean many things, fatherly or otherwise, and the life of leisure he led implied that he had some independent property. Was he not always much at the house, and were not his books and various offerings scattered about everywhere, even at her first visit? Brooke had written of horseback rides in his company. Surely he did not come alone out of respect for Mrs. Lawton or anxiety about the Cub's lessons. Why had Brooke blushed and been so resentful?

Lucy sprang up, and seizing a brush, began to work at her hair with a will, until the colour returned to her cheeks and the glossy dark locks wreathed her crown in a way to add a fascinating air of maturity to her arch face. Then, picking out the most dashing waist she had brought, having merely chosen her plainest clothing, she adjusted it over a long, flowing skirt and stood surveying herself for a moment, saying half aloud, "I will look at Milor Stead, widower; if he is a good possession for little Brooke, so be it, I stand aside; if not, I interfere!" and then a softened expression followed the one that Brooke's semi-challenge had called forth, and she added, with a sigh, "How I wish Brooke could have some one's whole, first, fresh love, be he rich or poor! She would keep it and live and die for it, and not mar it with a selfish thought. I wonder if Charlie is right

and that Tom Brownell is trying to avoid me? Bah! but it is really a handicap for a woman to have a rich father; the money lures those she dislikes, and gives the others blind staggers, and they bolt in the wrong direction."

Two minutes later, Lucy, wholly radiant, was pushing Adam Lawton's chair in to supper, and insisting that she was sure that he recognized her, even though he could not speak her name, while the Cub changed seats so as to be next her at table, and Pam insisted upon sharing the somewhat narrow chair by wedging herself between Lucy and the straight, high back.

CHAPTER XVII

LOCKS AND KEYS

TEN days passed, and June was urging the growth of flower and leaf with ardent breath. Even in the hill country, with its cool nights and winds that rush down the river valley, the days were sultry, and August lent her younger sister electric batteries for her relief; and almost every afternoon the soft, rounded summer clouds that seemed to flock about Windy Hill, like pasturing sheep, were put to flight by the dun-edged thunder scud with its whips of lightning.

C Robert Stead had now gone his way to the northwest at his friend's request, the work indoors and out had settled with an even and soothing monotony over the West farm, while the Sign of the Fox and its fame were already relieving Brooke's anxiety as to the immediate future.

As Lucy paced to and fro along the neatly gravelled walks of the old-fashioned garden, where the Cub was engaged in "brushing" the long line of sweet peas, a vocation requiring a knack that he did not possess, it seemed to her that two months, instead of two

weeks, had passed since her coming. Not that she was in any way bored or discontented, rather did it seem as if she had always been a part of the household and living her normal life, while the revelation, indoors and out, of work done by personal service, instead of by money proxy, had given her active brain much food for thought of a new though baffling order.

In many other ways also did Lucy feel herself baffled. Upon Robert Stead she had failed to make the slightest impression, either during the half-dozen calls he had made at the farm, or upon a ride she had taken in his company to his lodge on Windy Hill, when he had invited Mrs. Lawton and Brooke to see his garden and some prints of old masters that they had been discussing. The Cub being busy, Brooke had driven her mother in the buggy with old Billy, and Stead, who had ridden down with an extra saddle-horse in tow, had accompanied Lucy back.

Not that he was discourteous; quite the contrary. He was the polished man of the world, always polite, with a pretty compliment, too well-rounded for spontaneity, upon his lips and plenty of intelligent conversation, as well as chink-filling small talk that prevented dangerous pauses, yet withal he was inscrutable.

Hardly less so did Lucy find Brooke herself; perfectly free and frank in their daily intercourse, yet she neither offered nor asked special confidence. She brightened

with all the charm of a born hostess when Stead came, and he gravitated toward her as naturally; yet when he left, even for six weeks' stay, she exhibited no sign of loneliness and threw herself into her play, which she called the few hours she seized for painting, with fresh vigour, either working in the old carpenter's shop, that by opening a trap door above had a fine north light, or going into the open fields to use Enoch Fenton's colts, sheep, or oxen as studies.

It was not strange, however, that Lucy could not fathom the mind of either maid or man, for did they really know themselves? Stead was 'experiencing the conscious coming of a second youth, even before he was more than in the full vigour of middle life. The period of torpor through which he had passed was much like the indifference and languid, brooding time of adolescence before the bite of motive and passion awakens body and brain and clears the vision; and it was Brooke who blamelessly had brought all this to pass, Brooke, with her heroism of womanhood that was none the less subtle and acute because of its elusiveness.

Robert Stead loved her as a man loves but once, no matter how often he may marry, but this second passion was so different in its elements from the first that he did not recognize it as such, and consequently, unchecked, it doubled its hold, even while Lucy was unable to put two and two together, and piece a single palpable symptom.

In a state of rebellion bordering on disgust, Lucy, who heretofore had been the sort of woman that had usually obtained anything for which she had cared to try, and much for which she had not striven, turned her attention to the farmer-on-shares, — Walther, as she called him, who was undoubtedly a most filling and picturesque figure in the perfect series of pictures that grouped themselves between the homestead and the Moosatuk, — to find him not only difficult but impossible of approach, and try as she might, she had not yet succeeded in exchanging a word with him. At the same time many of his doings puzzled her, for though he was entirely his own master, by the very nature of the half-and-half agreement, and had nothing to do with the home garden or aught else about the place, his whole desire seemed to be of use and to serve its occupants, though unobtrusively.

It had been only a few mornings after her arrival that Lucy, just at dawn, looking out of one of her windows (which overlooked the back of the house, Brooke's having wholly a river view), discovered the big fellow setting out a quantity of seedling asters, a task that Brooke had begun the afternoon before, and darkness had stopped when half accomplished. Did Brooke know of it, she wondered.

Again, at the same hour, she saw him, hands encased in great leather mittens, uprooting the vigorous poison

ivy and tearing it from the pasture fences, and at once she remembered that Brooke bore the crusty burn of contact with it on one hand.

The Cub now and again remarked that Maarten was a brick and helped him out of lots of tight corners, without even a hint being given, and Lucy wondered if Brooke saw or understood; apparently she did neither, and yet the very day after the Cub had thrown down his armful of pea-brush in disgust at the tottering, inebriate line that rewarded his best efforts, the brush appeared all set in place, standing like an evenly trimmed hedge, attractive in its neatness, aside from the crop of fragrant promise that already was beginning to finger the support clingly with its tendrils.

But how was it with Brooke herself? If it is true that filial love or work in sufficiency can fill life to the brim, then hers was full to overflowing; yet this is not all, — work, to be the heaven it may be at its best, demands that the heart be satisfied.

Lorenz she had known less as a man than as an idealist, and it was this side of his nature that she loved, together with his respectful yet truth-speaking attitude. Then came the mystic picture, bringing with it to fan the naturally kindled flame the knowledge that he remembered! No further word had come from him since the verse of Sisyphus that she had answered merely by a spray of arbutus blossom, the New Eng-

land flower of spring hope, shining through melting snow. Could he interpret it? Perhaps not.

Sometimes a sense of the unreality of it all and the dream stuff it was made of came over Brooke, and she wondered if the spell would hold or if the separation was not more sweet than the reality; but this mood never lasted long.

Of the patient service of the farmer-on-shares she could no longer be ignorant, nor of the fact that he drew her eyes toward the landscape of which he had come to be an inseparable part. Unwittingly she found herself watching him day by day, though usually as a mere speck in the distance. At such times she was bewildered, and trembled at herself. Was it the poise of his head, and an occasional gesture as he stepped back to look at something that he had done, that reminded her of Lorenz and confused the two identities for the moment, or had the strain of the long winter of struggling warped her brain?

Brooke was no analyst who had made the mental dissipation of the dissection of motives take the place of natural emotion. The ideal of her nature had its outlet; why not then the real? It was the natural man in Maarten that drew her, something beneath the surface, obliterating the bands of caste and the social grades that divided their normal positions, though for that, except for her father's disastrous city

career, she was equally born a child of the soil and its heredities.

She avoided the hayfields, now swept by the June snow-storm of daisies, and in spite of success and her friend's companionship, was truly miserable for the first time, for she could neither understand nor throw off the spell she felt upon her. Self-respect is not oblivion, and is but a chilly comforter for youth.

The frequent thunder-showers had forced a new necessity upon the Sign of the Fox. An open shed at least must be had to protect vehicles that needed cover, while their occupants were sheltered by either screened porch or welcomed in the neat kitchen itself; so that an old lumber room in the cow barn had been cleared, and furnished with rings for tying up, the drivers upon the upper road being chiefly of horses; for the chauffeur avoided the steep, uneven hills, which jarred the constitution of the car of Juggernaut unpleasantly, even in the downward trip.

It chanced a little before this time that a party of young fellows, headed by Charlie Ashton, in his big Mercedes touring car, built for long-distance runs, had started for Gordon, where they were in demand for a tennis tournament. Ashton's chauffeur turning ill and unfit at the last moment, they had beat about, and discussed the possibility of substituting one of their number for the professional, as they all had more or

less experience; and the lot had fallen to Tom Brownell, who had joined the party for a brief vacation, at the end of which he was to take the position of city editor of the *Daily Forum*, a well-earned promotion for which his gift of discerning the true from the merely sensational peculiarly fitted him.

Brownell knew from Ashton that the Lawtons were located somewhere on the route they were to take, and ever since his first maladroit interview with Brooke he had desired to be of some service to her, that should atone for his blunder.

The pair of keys on which he had stepped that day in leaving the apartment had always remained, as it were, before his eyes, and after learning all possible details of the Lawton failure from many sources, he felt doubly convinced that, if these keys were placed, they might solve at least one of the many questions unanswered because of Mr. Lawton's illness. He had therefore asked Lucy Dean to get them if possible — which she had done.

Two months of following the faint trail furnished by two thin keys merely bearing numbers but not even the initials of their makers, had at last brought about a certain result which might or might not be satisfactory, but at least warranted him in seeing Brooke, and telling her of his progress; and this was one of his many motives of touring to Gordon.

He knew, from Lucy herself, that the Lawtons were located in the vicinity of Gilead, and inquired the nearest way to the homestead, when they reached the village late in the afternoon. On learning that it was on the hill road, and as the machine he was driving had had two temper fits within the hour, Brownell side-tracked it in a pleasant spot on the lower road, and leaving his companions to spend an hour with their pipes and the liquid remains of their luncheon, he started afoot up the cross-road.

There had been many people stopping for tea at the Sign of the Fox that afternoon; in fact, the last trap was only leaving as Brownell turned the corner, being that of Mrs. Parks, who dined at eight on purpose to have the sunset hours for driving, — a performance that the Senator could not understand.

Brownell hesitated a moment, as many others had done, as to which door, front or side, was the more direct entrance, and deciding upon the latter, turned the corner of the house and took the cobbled path that ran between the prim box bushes toward the kitchen door. As he passed under the window of the little library, the sound of a voice inside made him stop as abruptly as if a detaining hand had been laid on his shoulder. "They are at Coronado, — the engagement is announced, — they are to be married immediately, and instead of coming home with the party

go on to Vancouver and Alaska. Father can no longer be my all in all, yet there is no one to take his place!" were the words the voice uttered deliberately, with an accent half mocking, yet with an undercurrent of sadness to one who understood.

Standing on tiptoe for one brief moment, Brownell saw Lucy Dean's clear-cut face through the shielding vines; it was turned away from the window, and she continued speaking to some one whom he could not see, but easily divined was Brooke herself.

Recovering his power of motion as quickly as he had lost it, Brownell darted down the lane toward the barn, and opening the door of the first outbuilding that he reached, sprang in, closing it quickly behind him with a heedless bang, in all the guilty trepidation of some peeping Tom in fear of justice. In reality the being that Brownell most feared at that moment was himself, as rendered illogical, helpless, and oblivious of even the carefully planned work of his life, when in close proximity to Lucy Dean. If she turned and saw him, he knew himself lost, so that immediate flight was the only hope left.

From the moment he had first met her Brownell had admired her stanch friendship for Brooke, while her buoyant and frank audacity had soon fairly swept him off his feet. He had gone to the Dean house many times, it is true, half because not to do so would have

been brutally rude, half fluttering, moth-in-the-candle fashion and courting a singeing, until in the close companionship of the six weeks' journey that had been proposed, he saw that he would not only be at bay, but completely at the mercy of that most uncertain of quantities, the motherless daughter of an influential and wealthy man.

As an institution he had no quarrel with matrimony, — simply it had no place at present in his somewhat altruistic plan of work. He did not wish either to love or to marry; to see Lucy had cast him into the former state, and caused matrimony to fill the entire vista.

What had he to offer — that is, financially? Even with his promotion he could little more than compete with her father's *chef*. Of himself he had but an indifferent opinion, which was unwise, merely his ambitions were so far ahead of his achievements that he measured his shortcomings by the discrepancy.

That Lucy delighted to compete with him in a sort of game that Brooke had called "truth telling" he knew, also that in some way he seemed to stimulate her wit; but that there was a grain of sentiment in her practical, and what people thought somewhat hard, nature, he never for a moment dreamed. Therefore, knowing that if he saw her often the moment would come when from his own standpoint he must become

ridiculous in her eyes, he had escaped from the overland trip, as he now sought to escape the sudden and unexpected meeting by flight.

It would soon be dusk, and he could slip back to his companions unseen, make some easy excuse for not having called, and tell Brooke of his partial discovery by letter. This flashed through his mind as the door closed. At the same time he looked about the building that he had entered, to see if it had another exit, and discovered it to be a poultry house, the well-white-washed perches of which were crowded by mature, experienced hens, each wing-capped for the night. In the uncertain light he made a misstep on the uneven ground, compounded of ashes and broken lime, that formed the floor, which sent him reeling into the midst of the feathered multitude, and as he grasped a perch to save himself from rolling in the dust, he shook off the portly sleepers. A perfect babel of hen alarm arose as the frightened ladies flew in his face and lodged on his arms and shoulders in their useless flight.

"Be still," he called in a husky voice; "for heaven's sake don't raise such a devil of a row — they will take me for a rat or a weasel at the very least, and set the dogs on me," and then he laughed when he realized upon what unintelligent scatterbrains his words had fallen. The windows, all too small for retreat, were also netted. There was but one door, so finally, getting

his bearings, he made a dive for that, only to find it firmly fastened by Miss Keith's anti-chicken-thief spring lock! They say love laughs at locksmiths, but bitter satire! when before had the device of one of the craft imprisoned a man flying love, in a fowl house?

Folding his arms, with shoulders squared and jaw set, Brownell waited. Already he heard the barking of a dog, women's voices, and steps upon the porch of the house. Could any position be more preposterous?

* * * * *

Lucy had finished reading her letter, and stood in the porch, watching a catbird's fantastic wooing as it paused in the midst of an impassioned song to jeer, expostulate, coax, and protest all in a breath, now raising itself tiptoe on an ecstatic high note, and then languishing until it seemed to melt into the bushes. Every other bird loses self-consciousness and pours his heart out in the love time, the catbird never; and yet its compelling fascination lies in that it is always itself.

Lucy laughed softly as she watched the feathered pair, and said to Tatters, who stood beside her, "Do you know, old fellow, I think if any one woos me, he will have to do it all in a breath, and after hypnotizing me by his rattling, like that bird yonder, secure my hand and heart before I wake. How I wish I were that lady bird this very minute, having all this

fuss made for me, and sitting perfectly composed in a bush without a thought to spare for my trousseau!"

Tatters' answer was a low growl, and then a series of quick barks as the hubbub in the hennery began.

"I think something is stirring up your poultry; shall I go and see?" Lucy called, going around under Brooke's window, for the latter had gone up to rest a few moments after a tiresome afternoon.

"I guess the hens have only fallen off their perches, and are frightened," Brooke answered, coming to the window; "they often do, the sillies. It cannot be rats or weasels, for that is not Tatters' animal bark, — that tone means a man, and no one would be so foolish as to come prowling before dark."

Lucy continued to watch the catbird, but on the noise recommencing, Tatters growled again, and leaving the porch, nose to ground, skirted the library window, went to the gate, returned, stood under the window for a second with bristling hair, and then, leading straight to the fowl house, began tearing at the door.

Interested in his tactics, and thinking the intruder nothing worse than a prowling cat, Lucy threw the skirt of her flowered dimity over her arm and crossed the garden to the lane.

"Quiet, Tatters, quiet!" she cautioned, patting his head; "you must let me attend to this; dogs are not allowed in fowl houses, they have been known to

produce heart disease in susceptible young pullets. Sit down and watch out!"

Touching the spring, she released the latch, and opening the door cautiously, lest any fowls escape, she peered in, thus coming instantly face to face with the caged man! The shock for a moment made her lose her poise, and she almost tottered as she cried, "Tom Brownell!"

At the same time Tatters, seeing the strange man, sprang forward, and to keep him back Lucy stepped inside the sill-less door; his weight as he sprung closed it with a snap, making her in turn a prisoner.

"I thought you were in New York! What are you doing here?" she flashed, regaining her poise and colour at the same time.

"And I thought that you were in California," retorted Brownell, carelessly, hands in pockets, holding sentiment down hard.

"Then you did not come here to see me?"

"On the contrary, I came to see Miss Lawton! Are you usually to be found in chicken houses?"

"Ah, she *is*, then?" Suppose, as we must put up with each other's society until Tatters leads Brooke to our rescue, that we play the truth game to kill time, — you know that truth can be trusted to kill almost anything nowadays; I will ask the first question. Did you give up the California trip because you wished to avoid me?"

"Yes, but not in exactly the way — Yes, I did," this with an emphatic nod.

"It is my turn. Why did you not go to California?"

"Because — because —" and the eloquent Lucy became suddenly tongue-tied.

"Because of a prospective stepmother, was it not?" assisted Brownell, feeling an instant warmth about his heart, as her defiance relaxed.

"No, it was because you were not going — that is, because my feelings, my pride, were hurt," and again she raised her head with a defiant glance, adding hastily, "Now my turn. Why did you wish to see Brooke, and if you came to see her, why are you found hiding in the fowl house?"

"I came because I have learned something about those mysterious keys. They belong to a box in a little-known safe deposit company in Brooklyn, and the name of the lessee is not Lawton; further, they would not tell me, nor can I go on without some aid from the family. Does this errand meet with your approval?"

"Then the keys do belong to something! Come quick, Brooke, let us out and hear the news!" called Lucy, pounding on the door; but no response came, — only a growl, not from Tatters, but from the unseen thunder-shower that was, as usual, making its way over Windy Hill.

"As to your last question," continued Brownell, without heeding the interruption, "I was passing a window on the way to the side door when I heard a familiar voice reading a letter. One look confirmed my suspicion, and, like a wise brute in danger, I made for the nearest cover, not expecting to be made a prisoner, but to get off unseen!"

"Why do you avoid me? What have I done to make you hate me so?" Lucy almost whispered, a little break creeping into her voice that made Brownell start forward.

"Why? Because a sane man usually avoids a danger of which he has had many warnings. Don't look at me like that, Lucy, and for God's sake take your hand off my shoulder, or you'll make me forget my self-respect and let myself go, only to be mocked by a woman!"

But Lucy did not move her eyes or her hand, while its mate stole to his other shoulder.

"Talking of self-respect," she said slowly, but with an indescribable tender archness of accent, "why do you wish to make me lose mine by forcing me to throw myself into your arms? See, I am braver than you, I do not fear to be mocked by a man!"

"Lucy!"

"Tom!"

Those were the only two intelligible words of the

rush that followed, but even the catbird in the syringa bush, had his eye and ear been turned that way, might have taken a lesson in rapid and complete wooing and winning.

A patter of rain on the roof, another growl, and a flash caused Brooke to hasten out to the porch to look for her friend, while Tatters still barked and clawed at the door of the poultry house. Opening the door, she spied Lucy, who, for the moment, had pushed Brownell into the darkness behind her.

"So you looked for cats and weasels, and the door slammed on you!" she cried, dragging Lucy out by the wrist, and brushing away the whitewash that powdered her dark hair. "Hurry back to the house, for you know that neither one of us has a love of thunder-storms!"

"You were right, Brooke, it was not Tatters' animal bark, — it was a man that frightened the fowls," answered Lucy, still holding back.

"A man! Then why do you stay out here in the dusk? Who was it? You are laughing, — it must have been Adam playing a trick on us!"

"Adam! Oh, no, it is the man I am going to marry! Brooke Lawton — Tom Brownell! I believe, by the way, you have never before been properly introduced!" and the next flash saw three figures, followed by a joyous dog, scudding toward the house under a burst of rain.

* * * * *

While the storm raged it was impossible either for Brownell to regain his companions or to communicate with them in any way, while the probabilities pointed to the chance of their having returned to Bisbee's stable for shelter at the first signs of the storm.

At the supper table Lucy's radiance was so dazzling that no one could pretend to ignore it. The Cub, to whom Brownell was of course a stranger, was inclined to be resentful and clumsily sarcastic, but as the elder man had both tact and magnetism, he speedily concluded that it was better to have a new friend than an unnecessary enemy. Mrs. Lawton and Miss Keith were made partakers of the news by mere inference before the formal words were spoken, and Brownell at once became a friend of the family, even before the matter of the keys and his diligence in their interest came up. Brownell took the bits of metal from his pocket and laid them on the table beside him, as he told of his idea that, being paired and of the type that is used by safety-vault companies, they might in some way be connected with the personal belongings of Mrs. Lawton and Brooke; how that by chance he had seen keys of a similar pattern in the pocket of a friend, but, in locating the company, had found the name given by the man renting the box to be West and not Lawton!

"That was grandmother's maiden name, and this

is the West homestead," said Brooke, in a tense whisper. "The keys must have something to do with father and all of us, if we can only fathom how!"

"If West is a family name, the rest must unravel in time," said Brownell, looking eagerly toward Adam Lawton, who, sitting as usual in his wheel-chair at the foot of the table, had turned slightly toward the young man, idly fingering the keys, his eyes fixed on the distance.

The circular storm, that had veered off for a time, now returned with renewed fury. Pam jumped into Lucy's lap and hid her head under the table-cloth. Miss Keith fled to her room and bounced into the middle of her feather-bed, to "keep her feet off the floor," as she said. Lucy held Tom tightly by the hand, while even Mrs. Lawton and Brooke grew pale and the Cub feigned an indifference that he was far from feeling, for the effect of the air charged with electricity was palpable and not to be ignored.

There came a moment when a series of explosions followed one another like pistol shots, next a scathing flash and a deafening report, and at the same instant a sound of ripping and tearing in front of the house, while a sulphurous odour filled the room.

Tatters, who was huddled close to Brooke, raised his head and gave a weird howl, and for a moment no one had either power of speech or motion.

Brownell was the first to recover, and going quickly to the front door, he threw it open and looked out. The giant button-ball inside the fence was split from crown to trunk, and great twisted splinters littered the short grass; but the old pine, holding the Sign of the Fox upon one of its gnarled arms, stood safe and intact like a good omen.

"Look at father!" were Brooke's first words, spoken as Brownell returned, and the entire group about the table watched him in wonder.

At the flash his eyes had closed and a tremor passed over him, but when he opened them again, a new intelligence was there. Slowly he looked about; then, noticing the keys, that had remained between his fingers, he clasped them tightly with an exclamation of satisfaction, and, turning toward his wife, who had drawn close to his chair, said slowly, with perfect articulation, yet hesitatingly, as if each word suggested its neighbour: "Mela, here are those keys of the new box that I hired to-day to hold your little belongings. I — seem — to — have — dreamed — that I — lost — them! I may have a business ordeal — to go through — and what little belongs to you — and — daughter must be put apart — in — safety. I took — this — in the name — of Adam West, and to-morrow Brooke must go — also — to be recognized — Where am I? how — did I come here at the old home?" Slipping

from her chair, Brooke went to her mother, and gently, each holding a hand, they wheeled the chair back to the familiar bedroom, so that neither place nor people should cause the return of memory to rush too swiftly and overtax itself. Brooke left her father and mother together there, and going to the library, wrote a brief note to Dr. Russell, asking his guidance in this new crisis that might mean so much or so little.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RETURN OF MEMORY

OF the household at the homestead, one heart sank instead of rejoicing, at the first sign of the return of memory to Adam Lawton. This one bumped painfully in the chest of the Cub, as, leaving the room unnoticed, with face pale as it had not been for months, and unheeding the flapping sheets of rain that smote and enveloped at the same moment, he fled to the barn and threw himself with head buried in his arms on the dwindling haymow that had once sheltered the little fox.

Poor Cub, with the first perfectly lucid utterance of his father all the old cringing dread had returned, and his manhood again struggled with the fear that he had believed dead. This, also, after five months of proving the stuff of which he was made by bitter, patient toil, until day by day the warring elements were adjusting, the jangling grew fainter, and at each hammer touch of experience the metal rang more true. If Adam Lawton could have realized this, and seen his boy with unbiassed clearness, the loss of money and life itself would have

been nothing to the bitterness that would have come to him as the results of his arbitrary attitude.

The Cub need not have trembled. Remember whatever Adam Lawton might, a law of life had been broken and their positions were reversed, the leader must be led, the dictator of another's free-born will must be protected, gently dealt with, guarded from trouble, loved pitywise, but never would he square his shoulders to the world and give and take. Can worse irony of fate come to any man who has really lived?

An hour after the electric bolt had riven the plane tree planted as a landmark by the first West, and by its mystic influence cleared Adam Lawton's brain, the warm June moon, a line from full, was slowly pushed edgewise from between the clouds and rolled slantwise above Moosatuk, a giant coin of gold, fresh and articulate from the mint.

Lucy Dean and Tom Brownell, coming out-of-doors the instant the storm abated, walked up and down the cobbled path, all oblivious of the puddles between the stones or of the dripping trees above. Brownell had meantime entirely forgotten how he came to be where he was, also his friends below on the river road, whose motive power he represented for the time being, or the fact that, as the only resting-place in Gilead for the homeless was a "Commercial Hotel" of small dimensions and still less visible cleanliness, it would be

necessary for them either to sleep in the touring car or in Gordon.

As the pair for the twentieth time reached the road end of the path and turned again into the deep, sweet-smelling shadows of the great box bushes, a buggy turned the corner from the cross-road and came to a halt by the side gate. A slender male figure in a light suit and cap, leaping therefrom, attracted their attention, and Brownell exclaimed, "Great Cæsar! I've forgotten those wretches down below and they've come for me! Now for it! right-about face, Lucy!" at the same time by a dexterous turn of the arm catching her about the waist; for Lucy, whose chief pride had always been facing the music, whether necessary or not, had started to bolt, and exhibited as charming a bit of struggling confusion as the heart of man could desire.

The moonlight struck the man's face as he came forward. "It's only Charlie Ashton," she said, freeing herself at once, her head raised to its defiant poise; "as he doesn't know that I am here, it is his turn to be surprised!"

Charlie Ashton, the useful and ornamental, did not bear a reputation for overweening brilliancy; but the moment his eyes rested upon the pair before him, divided though they now were by a box bush, he divined what had happened.

"So this was the plot, and the reason you thought the

hill would disagree with the auto, and left us to drown all this time down on that soaking river road so that you could meet Lucyfer alone," he cried, seizing Brownell by the hand and nearly wringing it off, while he aimed a kiss at his cousin's cheek, in token of his approval, which by a toss of the head landed on her chin.

"On my word, Charlie, there was no plot, it was pure accident. I never dreamed of my luck!"

"Most certainly not!" interrupted Lucy; "otherwise he would have been safe and sound in Gordon two hours ago, instead of being engaged to me. He really came here to tell Brooke about the keys, but circumstances which he could not control (as he did the overland trip) obliged him to see me first in a place hardly as airy, though quite as secluded, as a special Pullman vestibule!"

Ashton, scenting a mystery, but being too wary to press his cousin for the clew, gave Brownell's hand a final wring, saying, without being in the least aware of his play upon words, "She's a match for you, old man, stubborn as you are — yes, and more than a match, and you have my profound sympathy; but do have pity on us to-night and pilot us into Gordon, for we are damp and hungry and sleepy, and this old plug is all I could get at the stable. To-morrow you shall have the confounded car for the rest of the week to return here in, choose your passenger, and go and break down in the

wildest cross-road of this confounded hill country. I'll even give you leave to ruin a tire, or if the worst comes to the worst, wrench the steering gear, though I hope that won't be necessary. Cheer up, Lucyfer, it isn't nine o'clock yet, and he can have a good sleep and be back in twelve hours. I'll go in and see the ladies a moment while you do the finals!"

"I shall write to father to-night," Lucy said abruptly, as the door closed upon Ashton, and Pam, who had been waiting to get out, began bounding about her friend, giving yelps of joy. "What do you suppose he will say?"

Brownell began to speak, then paused, setting his teeth, and raising Lucy's chin gently, looked steadily in her face — "He will say one of two things, according to his mood. Either that, resenting a stepmother, you have thrown yourself away upon the first fellow who chanced by; or that you have met the man who is to be, what he could not, 'all in all' — that you have found your mate!"

And Lucy, pale with feeling, a different pallor from that the moonlight gives, returned his gaze fearlessly, proudly, and from the lips that met his bitterness vanished, while truth remained. He was indeed her mate, her match, the first of many suitors, rich and poor alike, who had wooed her, man to woman, without thought or apology of money.

The second day after the great storm, for such it came to be called, its erratic course through the hill country being blazed by lightning-splintered trees and gullied watercourses, Dr. Russell came and with him the Lawtons' lawyer. Little by little the various happenings were made clear, his situation and as far as might be his presence at the farm explained, while, as the days went by, slowly the jarred brain fitted the links in the chain of memory. But Dr. Russell said truly, that Adam Lawton's grit and grip were broken once for all, desire of power was dead and in its place came desire of peace. Soon the little pottering details of the farm, despised in youth, seemed dearer than aught else, and he would sit for hours in his wheel-chair, training a vine or busied with harness buckles in the barn. Nothing, however, would induce him to allow his chair to go outside the gate, or to drive about the country or to the village with Adam or Brooke upon their many errands.

Side-tracked though he was to many eyes, one of his selves, the one unknown, — for most of us have two, — came back to him through kinship with the soil; and at his first words of pride in and praise of Adam's usefulness, the boy had fled away to the rick again, great sobs tearing his throat, but in this tempest lay no dread, and with those tears the Cub cast off his nickname and leaped a year in manhood.

Toward his wife Adam Lawton was all tenderness,

as in the early years, and once more he called her Mela. But instead of the protective pride of lover to sweetheart, it was the twofold, leaning quality, that makes some men as they age seek the mother element in their wives and rest upon it.

Before July came round the little property of Mrs. Lawton and Brooke, together with the farm deed and the jewels, was restored to them. In all it made an annual sixteen hundred dollars, less by many times than either woman had spent for clothing or the many little luxuries and nothings that smooth and beautify the daily life — yet for their station they had been frugal women, though always generous.

This money did not lessen Brooke's determination or endeavour; it simply turned striving to possibility of life in the composite household. Neither, had the sum been ten times what it was, would any of the three, mother, daughter, son, have cared to give up the work and with it motive; simply Brooke could now dream more than day-dreams of her art. Rosius, the animal painter, had built a studio at Gordon, and, after seeing a head that Brooke had done of Senator Parks's prize bull, he had replaced his usual shrugging lethargy toward amateurs by enthusiasm, offered to criticise her work throughout the season, and take her as a student of animal anatomy in his winter studio in Washington, where the models of the Zoo would be open to her, saying, "You feel, you

understand, you catch the thought, the meaning in the eyes, — this must be born, not taught, all the rest only means much work and is learnable.”

If all went well and the Sign of the Fox remained her talisman, who knew but the fund might grow, her father become strong enough to be house man in more than name, Adam might have some education even if Stead returned to work, and she herself could steal a month or two in the dead season? — for the Parkses would be in Washington, and both the Senator and his wife took an interest in her work, not born of desire to patronize.

Presently Adam Lawton began to read a little and could move slowly from porch to garden seat, steadied by canes, and attend to many of his wants. Then one glad day Mrs. Fenton had come down in her wheelchair, and by sheer force of will broke the home-staying spell by coaxing him to drive back to a country boiled dinner with her, saying, “Don’t you remember, Adam, when we were boy and girl together, and I said I’d go to your father’s barn-raising dance with whichever of you boys could lift himself up and touch his chin to the schoolroom door frame, three times? Some boys couldn’t claw, and some got a grip and let go, while some wanted boosting. You were the smallest, yet you got a hold and lifted yourself slowlike, inch by inch, until you got there. That’s the way now, Adam!

You've had your tumble, and naturally you've got to help lift yourself!"

Was it what rural folks call a good growing season, or did love and labour brighten and sweeten the simple garden flowers beyond their wont? Who can say? Adam had made some corner brackets for the vine-screened "tea room" porch, which Brooke had covered with tufts of gray moss and coral-capped lichens, and here every day she placed, as well as on the table, quaint stone jugs and lustre pitchers, rescued from the high top shelf of Grandma West's dresser, filled them with sweet peas, Madonna lilies, mignonette, sweet-william, and clove pinks, and kept long sprays of sweet syringa, lilacs, snowballs, lemon-lilies, foxgloves, larkspur, hollyhocks, according to the season, in an old stone churn raised upon a bench before the kitchen window end to veil it.

Not only did the garden yield its best to those who paused for refreshment in passing by, but Brooke's measure of added liberty, scant though it was, gave her a breathing time to go abroad for flowers of roadside, wood, and the rank river meadows; and while her eyes and hands were busy with the blossoms, her soul drank in the beauty of the scenes beyond, her heart beat strong, and her whole nature seemed to expand and perfect itself in the growth and perfecting of the earth about her.

It was on the return from one of these walks through the river meadows, arms laden with blue fleur-de-lis and golden sundrops gathered to the tinkling music of soaring bobolinks, that she met the postman turning up the cross-road from the lower pike, and he begged that she would take the mail, as he had none this afternoon for any other on that branch and his horse was lame.

Good-naturedly she turned up a corner of her skirt to act as mail pouch, for the papers, circulars, and what not made quite a budget.

Reaching the boundary of her land when halfway uphill, and being wrist-cramped by the double load, she dropped her flowers and mail, and sitting in the shade began to sort it. Behind her was the rye field, and the wind curling across the crisping ears, now gold-green, made sound as of a gently rising tide on pebbled shores, while as she leaned against the bank the bayberry, sweet-gale, and hay ferns breathed their wild fragrance.

Oh, what a day it was! June dominance and rush yielding to the more finished manners of July — nothing was lacking! That is, nothing attainable; the love of things seemed to eclipse the love of people. Ah, no, not quite, for as she gazed idly at the letters in her lap, her heart gave a great throb, and one square package lurched and slid between her trembling fingers,

for the address on it was written in Ashton's eccentric hand. Picking it up, she laid the others by, and steadying herself deliberately broke the seal, for it was sealed endwise with wax. Inside was a double-folded piece of foreign-looking paper, but no other address or postmark, the transit cover evidently having been torn or soiled, and not a written word of any sort in view. Within its folds a little square of millboard, the duplicate of that which had borne her picture, only from this looked forth the face of Lorenz himself, standing in a doorway, clad in his loose blouse, palette and brush in hand. The heavy thatch of hair shaded his forehead deeply, the face was thinner than she remembered it, the chin under the thick mustache more determined, the jaw set with a depth of purpose, while the eyes looked half away as if seeking inspiration and yet followed her everywhere, until Brooke covered them with her hand a moment as if to escape the too tense gaze of a real presence.

Hoofs sounded on the road, and there passed by Enoch Fenton with his horse-rake, coming in neighbourly fashion to help the farmer-on-shares gather up the timothy hay from its last sunning to house it before nightfall; to-morrow it would be turn about, according to country lore. Seeing Brooke he stopped, and after making the usual crop and weather epigrams, said: "That there man of our'n is right smart and steady,

but he hustles too much and he's losing girth — 'fore summer's out he'll be slim enough to swim through an eel run. I've advised him, if he's goin' to follow the soil, to locate farther north, but he seems unsettled and I reckon he'll move on after leaf-fall, — they mostly do, the smart ones, besides which he acts as if the girl he's waitin' fer wasn't comin'. If she don't, she's a silly, for I nary seen a man with two strong hands hev such a wise head!

"Say, but you look sort of like a picter setting there with all them posies, something like the one on the calendar they give with the 'Rise up bake powder' when you've bought six cans. It's called 'The Love Letter,' only the girl's got red heels to her shoes and powered-up hair, besides which they'd bought her too small a pattern for her waist to piece it well up in front!

"Want ter know! I bet it's a love letter, his picter and all, and I'm right glad on't!" Then farmer Fenton chirruped to his horses and went his way, laughing to himself, and turning the tobacco from cheek to cheek with relish, for Brooke had reddened under his banter, and in trying to save the sliding letters in her lap had not only dropped them, but the picture as well (which the farmer barely saw, having no glasses). When she stooped to gather them up, and slipped the picture inside her blouse for safer keeping, a second shadow crossed the road — that of Henry Maarten, following

the brook path to the hay-field, but if he saw her in the sheltered bank nook he made no sign; neither did Brooke, but huddled there among the ferns elated, disappointed, and quite bewildered, until the sound of hoof and wheel had died away, and she knew that both men were well within the fence.

The words that Enoch Fenton muttered as he walked, talking to himself in lengthy monologue, after the style of those much alone, were these: "Bob Stead! by gosh, he's been away a month, and what's more likely than he's sent his picter and writes reglar? Anyhow, all the women folks this side of Windy Hill and further has planned it so, and so it's bound to be! Besides which our darter's boy, Willie, was lookin' fer winter-green for mother's rheumatiz up in North Woods beyond Stony Guzzle two months back, and he spied a couple settin' by the stream a-holdin' hands and eatin' apples. Now if that ain't courtin'—what is? Though it's only jest likely hit and miss, wife and Sairy Ann Williams met and pieced together who they wuz. He's a mum sort, but that's the kind it takes a girl to get goin', and he's well set up, funds and all, though oldish! Well, she might do worse seein' she's had a taste o' pinchin'," and selecting a fine spear of timothy with which to pick his teeth, Fenton reversed the rake and mounted.

Adam had written to Stead several times since his going away, and received cheerful, though brief, replies,

which, however, said nothing definite as to his return, and though the time mentioned was a month, the term might be merely nominal. All the household had missed him in their different ways, the Cub with almost girlish sentiment, Mrs. Lawton as a link with the state of life that was, and Brooke chiefly because she was entirely used to him and associated him with so much that had given hope and eased the winter rigour, that the friendship to her had become almost the easy intimacy of relationship.

It was an afternoon early in July that Brooke was searching along the foot-path in the hemlock woods above the Fenton's for the flowers of pipsissewa, with their wax petals and spicy wood fragrance, when the snapping of twigs made her turn, and striding down the hill, straight into the light, with quick, elastic step, came Robert Stead, a new, alert expression on his well-tanned face that wiped at least half a dozen years from his time record.

Brooke was surprised and also frankly glad. Dropping her flowers, she held out both her hands and told him so.

"As this is the first word from you in five long weeks, it is well that it is a kind one," he replied. Then, holding her off, he looked at her as if to make sure it was she herself, and not the masquerading gypsy girl whose image always rose and came between them when he met her out-of-doors.

"Ah, so much has happened since then! but Adam has written it all, except perhaps that now I may hope to go to Washington for next winter to study. That is quite far off, however, so tell me about yourself, also how working has agreed with you!" she added mischievously.

"Work! They tell the truth — those that call it the master-word that unlocks all barriers! Child, child, do you know what you have done for me by acting and teaching it, so that now to me life, that was ended (as far as joy is life), has but begun?"

"Not only the desire for work, but the motive, came from you — is you! You have the magic crystal of youth, I hold anew the power to shield it; you have the fire of genius, I the fuel to feed its flame! Come to me, Brooke; with you only I can forget, forgive! Redeem the past for me!"

As he paused with arms extended, Brooke shrank backward against the trunk of a great hemlock, bewildered, dizzy almost, by the sudden fierceness of his passion, confounded by the meaning that now banished what was friendship. She moistened her lips nervously and tried to speak, but found no words.

Hardly noticing her silence, he swept on: "Listen, and you will believe that I know love at last. Ever since the day I met you by the trout stream, I have understood how Helen could give up all to save her

lover. Why do you shrink? Is it all too sudden, my rebirth? Did you not even guess?"

Brooke steadied herself with difficulty and merely shook her head. Stead leaned toward her and would have clasped her in his arms, but something in her face held him at bay.

"What is it, child? for God's sake, don't look so! I have frightened you! You welcomed me as a friend, why not a lover? Am I then too old for that?" and for an instant an iron frown drove the radiance from his face.

Slowly Brooke began to realize that he was offering her his love, his protection to them all. It meant pleasant companionship, no more struggling, certainty and reasonable ease, time for study. For an instant she felt weary, overcome, vanquished, and the relief within her grasp seemed almost sweet. The next moment her woman's nature, frank and real, knew that this was not all, and faltering, yet gaining courage as she spoke, she answered:—

"That is not it; you do seem old to me, but if I had loved you, I should not think of that or know it—only that I loved you."

"And how can you know that you do not? you with the transparent nature of a child, how can you judge of these things as well as those who have been tried by fire? Unless—" and his voice dropped and the colour

died from his face, leaving it an earthy gray under its coat of tan—"unless there is some one else this time as there was before. Is there this some one, Brooke, and has he stood proof as well?"

Brooke's pallor left her, and strength came to limb and voice. Stepping quickly toward him, she laid her hands on his that were now held clenched, and looking into his face said, in a voice quivering with coming tears: "I need your pity, too. There is another, Robert Stead, but he does not and may never know."

"God help us both," he murmured, and stooping almost reverently, pressed the kiss upon the folded hands with which a moment before he would have sought to kindle the fire in her lips.

For many moments they stood thus, and then Brooke said, with difficulty, "You will come sometimes to see my mother and Adam? Oh, do not let my blindness make you cast him off!"

"Yes and no—" Stead answered, as they turned and walked mechanically down the wood lane toward the highway.

Once in the open he paused and said, in a voice so low and trembling that it was but a whisper, "I have a report to make to-night, but to-morrow I will go to see your mother." Then, taking her hand gently: "Do not grieve, gentle one, I was blind too; we are all blind when the heart's eye is satisfied. At worst, you have

done more than you know for me; now, the motive lacking, I shall try to work for work's sake — and —” pointing eastward — “I shall still share with you the River Kingdom!”

No word of this ordeal ever passed the lips of Brooke, but it lay heavily upon her, for she was of the sort who feel that love, honestly proffered, even if unsought, carries an eternal obligation. Yet some one else had seen and shared the secret that lay buried between them, and read the meaning amiss. The farmer-on-shares had crossed the path below on his way from Enoch Fenton's rye-field at the moment that Stead had stooped to kiss Brooke's folded hands.

CHAPTER XIX

SETTERS OF SNARES

THE month of Lucy Dean's stay spread itself over the entire summer, and before she left the fragrance of wild grapes came from the river woods, and the blue ribbon binding the tasselled grasses of the moist meadows was loomed of Puritan fringed gentian instead of royal fleur-de-lis. Time was when Lucy's protracted presence, under like circumstances, would have been a strain, akin to moving in a comedy of rapid action, where every actor must be on the alert to take his cue. But to this restless, high-strung woman love had come as a clarifier, like the magic electric touch that vitalizes the air after the summer storm has passed, and makes the breath come more freely.

As she became an open book to her friend, their relative positions altered, and the transparent Brooke of old in her turn became a mystery to Lucy, while Stead fairly piqued her to the point of anger. She thought she knew at least the eyemarks of masculine devotion, and before Stead's June departure she had read them in all their changefulness when his eyes

rested upon Brooke, and wondered if she were wholly blind, or seeing it unwillingly, feigned blindness. Time would tell, she thought, for judging by herself, she knew that, to some moods at least, separation is the searcher of hearts in doubt. All visible signs, however, had failed, as on the return the visits, though hardly less frequent, seemed to lack the personal spontaneity of before, and to come under the family or merely casual order. Still this might be accounted for by the fact that Stead was absorbed in the designing of a serious piece of work of some magnitude, and the remote hermitage had become the destination of men of divers sorts, — old friends who had been held almost forcibly aloof and new professional acquaintances.

Dr. Russell, who had been at too great a distance to divine the intimate reason of the revulsion, laid it wholly to the humanizing effect of the general companionship and contact with the wholesome, firm-purposed family life of the homestead, and he rejoiced exceedingly that at last his friend had, as it were, separated self from shelf, and stood aside from the self-inflicted gloom of his own shadow. But one day, chancing upon Stead in New York, and reading a different, yet deeper, suffering, purged of old selfishness, in his face, his habit of mental diagnosis, tinged with kindly philosophy, was at an equal loss with Lucy's lightning intuition.

As to Brooke, she walked straight forward, almost mechanically, throughout those summer days, filled alike with work and sunshine. The anxiety of the winter had been to know if the new life could possibly become a permanence. Now life under the Sign of the Fox seemed a thing assured; and yet the days seemed longer labourwise now than before, for though Brooke could read the material future, she did not know herself. The culmination of Stead's friendship pained her, almost haunted her, though chiefly because it had laid bare the needs of her own heart. Ideal and real alike had grown intangible. Even Lorenz' picture seemed to look at her in reproach, and the giant shadow of the farmer-on-shares crossed the fields less frequently now that the growing time was past. It seemed, too, that Enoch Fenton's words were proving true, for the man had grown gaunt under the scorching sun and toil, and Bisbee duly reported that his plans had fallen through about his sweetheart and settling, and that he was going to the old country before winter.

As to Lucy's proposed descent upon the farmer-on-shares, begun in a spirit of teasing and continued purely through curiosity, it was, as she afterward termed it, "a regular toboggan slide"; and no matter in what way or from where she approached him, without the least apparent effort on his part, he was im-

mediately at the farthest possible point away from her. So that a one-sided wager she had made with Brooke, who professed complete ignorance, that she could tell the colour of his eyes and what he would look like without his "barbarous beard" at first sight, remained unproven, — for Lucy there was no near-by first sight at all.

From the West homestead Lucy Dean had gone to Gordon to visit Mrs. Parks. After she had been away a week the early twilight saw her coming up the cross-road from Gilead station, driven by the ubiquitous Bisbee boy in the same buggy that had brought Ashton the night of the storm.

No one was ever wholly surprised at any action on Lucy's part, and when Mrs. Lawton and Brooke noticed that the buggy had driven away again, they concluded that Lucy had come to bid them good-by before returning home, as the papers were full of the return of the new Mrs. Dean to New York, of the satisfaction of their friends in general, and of the popularity of the couple. They themselves were both dubious as to how Lucy would enjoy being even temporarily only a daughter in the house where she had reigned supreme; and though Mr. Dean had cordially approved of Lucy's engagement, it was well understood that it must necessarily be a long one.

After the greetings were over, and Lucy learned

their thoughts of her coming, she did not appear as much at ease as usual.

"The fact is," she began abruptly, "I haven't come to say good-by; I'm stopping with Mrs. Parks until she goes to town, for the Senator has to be away, and we hit it off nicely together. I've taught the heir apparent endless tricks, so that he can outrank any baby of the social circus, and consequently of course they adore me.

"I've come to bid Tom good-by, for he is suddenly being sent abroad to report socially, politically, and otherwise on that Congress at The Hague. Of course it isn't exactly the work of city editor, but he knows the ground and languages and all of that, besides which it will be good for him in every way, and he sails on Saturday!"

"But where is he?" asked Brooke, too much puzzled to be surprised. "We have not seen him, and how do you expect to meet him here when he knows that you are in Gordon? though I've often thought it safest to look for you where you are not, for there is where you are usually to be found," and then they both laughed at the Irish bull Brooke had perpetrated.

"The telephone, my dear — from Gordon to New York — price one dollar! He wired frugally: 'Sail for Hague Saturday, will be in Gordon to-night,' upon which I called him up, and limited his trip to Gilead,

supper at the Sign of the Fox, afterward the Commercial Hotel by the depot, unless *urgently* requested by Mrs. Lawton to pass the night in the wasp room with the black walnut furniture! Unfortunately, as you have no 'phone, I could not inform you of the arrangement until I came in person," and even Adam Lawton joined quietly in the laugh that followed Lucy's audacious confession.

"There will be a 'phone here for you to announce your marriage next summer, if you grow impatient of watching and waiting," said Brooke mischievously; "so many people have asked us to have it that they may send orders with less trouble, and then both Cousin Keith and mother think that it would be real economy of both time and material for us to know when large parties are driving out."

Tom Brownell came duly, and Mrs. Lawton almost purred with content as she saw the pair of strong young faces at the tea-table, happy with the tender happiness that is refined by a coming parting for anticipated good. Again the two paced up and down the path beside the house in the moonlight, but this time it was the young hunter's moon, curved as a powder-horn, and hurrying early to bed after his sun mother, that looked narrowly between the trees athwart the western sky.

"It will be a splendid trip for you, — nothing could

be better," said Lucy, brightening; "you've not had a month out of the city these two years past."

"It would be better if it were to be our wedding journey," answered Brownell; "being engaged may be an excitement and stimulant to the sluggish, but for us the calmness of certainty would be far better; but as it is, dear, I am more than thankful for my half-loaf."

Lucy did not speak for a few moments, and then, turning swiftly and putting both hands on his shoulders, in her old earnest fashion, said, transfixing him with her black eyes, in which mischief and pleading now struggled for mastery: "If a thing would be better, it is wrong not to do it, for we are bound to do our best. It shall be our wedding journey. How much money have you of your very own?"

Stunned into plain fact-telling, Brownell named a sum of less than three thousand dollars, accumulated of extras and contributions to magazines.

"Good! I have as much more of my half year's allowance, which papa always pays in advance; it will do very nicely!"

"But Lucy, you wonder, I will not take a wedding trip or travel on your money!"

"Certainly not; yours will be more than enough for two months! I will save mine for the suburban cottage furniture on our return, and I can paper a not too big room beautifully myself, if the paper has stripes

to guide by. Miss Keith taught Brooke and me this past summer, and we practised on the pantry, which looks quite well, because when the shelves were put back they hid the bubbles, where our arms ached and we didn't rub the paper smooth."

"But think a moment, sweetheart," almost gasped Brownell, who felt that he was on the full run downstream toward rapids for which he had not a paddle adjusted to shoot in safety. "Where shall we be married? This is Wednesday, — there are only three days! How about your father? and then, clothes? — women always need clothes! Don't think I am objecting; it's only that I will not take unfair advantage of your warm-heartedness," he added, as a shadow of disappointment lurked on her piquant face.

"Where? Here, to-morrow, at the Sign of the Fox, father and company to be bidden by telephone; they can arrive at three-forty, and go on to Gordon later. As to clothes — oh, Tom! all women have clothes enough in which to follow their heart's desire, and I have trunks full!"

Then that slim young hunter's moon (which should have been in bed) thought some one called him softly, and, looking back, saw what would have lured his godmother Diana from her hunting trail of solitude!

For the second time that season the personal affairs of Lucy and Brownell electrified the sober old house

by their rapidity, and each one received the news quite differently. Miss Keith rushed for the raisin jar and began seeding with might and main, and handled the spice boxes until they rattled, for it would take all the early morning hours to bake the wedding cake, and all the early afternoon to cool it.

The Cub was in his element, as, with Billy harnessed to the buggy, he escorted Tom Brownell to the telephone office and the parson's. Brooke and Lucy opened a great chest in the attic, where some gowns of past luxury were stowed away, to find a muslin for Brooke's part of bridesmaid; while Mrs. Lawton, thinking as ever first of her husband, told him of the happenings with her hand resting on his, to secure attention, and at the same time wondered, somewhat apprehensively, how the sight of his old friend in the flower of his prosperity would affect him. She need not have troubled, for Adam Lawton dwelt in that strange between-land called Peace, where life is made up of apathy and simple comfort, and was content, a state altogether different from the triumphant peace that follows work achieved or victory won.

So it came about that the next afternoon at five, in the little library of the homestead, two strong human identities merged, and Lucy, no longer Lucy Dean, in her dark red travelling gown, her bouquet made by Brooke of fleece-white garden chrysanthemums, turn-

ing to her father, clasped her arms about his neck with a new fervour, and whispered, "You see I'm still following your lead, you dear old daddy, so have a care!" Then, led by Brownell, she went to the screened porch, gay with bright leaves and berries, to cut the wedding cake, which, both well baked and safely cooled, crowned the hastily improvised collation. Tatters and Pam appeared wearing white neck bows, and the only outsiders were Mrs. Parks and Charlie Ashton, the mysterious coming of whom no one could fathom, and of which he emphatically declined to tell. Although Brooke watched him wistfully and lingered after the others had left for Gilead station, he made no sign.

It was three months since Lorenz had sent word or token. Was it, after all, only an illusion? Brooke even began to doubt if Ashton's was really the hand that had forwarded the letters from Lorenz. She was minded to ask him outright, but while she hesitated the moment passed, for, entering Mrs. Parks's landau, he returned with her to Gordon. Looking up at the Sign of the Fox, her talisman, as she passed under it and in at the gate, she wondered if it would ever see another wedding, and smiled in spite of her own thoughts, and at the possible comic answer to them as she looked up the path and saw the parson, lately installed, an unencumbered man of sixty, taking his fourth cup of tea, alternating lemon and cream, while Miss Keith

twittered about him with the eatables, and gave a deeply freckled blush at some remark he made in stowing a small, flat package of wedding cake in his waistcoat pocket. Thus does hope often triumph over experience.

* * * * *

Again it was the hunting season, and Dr. Russell would soon come for his autumn holiday. Stead waited for him with more than usual eagerness, being in pitiful want of companionship in which he need no longer play a part that was growing every day more impossible and intolerable. Brooke desired to see the doctor, and learn if possible how far her father's steady and rational improvement might be trusted; and Miss Keith, remembering some past advice of his, began to feel tremulously that possibly before another visit she might need a fresh instalment, and so resolved to be forehanded.

Much game had been let loose during the past few years in the hill country in a sportsmanlike effort to restock it as far as might be, and when this is done there follows the pot-hunter with his snares. Robert Stead, always an enemy of these slouching malefactors of wood and brush lot, had this season announced that he was prepared to give the tribe no quarter. The very day before the doctor's expected arrival he had covered their shooting grounds quite thoroughly, and

after breaking numerous snares, set with the utmost boldness on his own immediate land, he took his gun and ambushed himself at dusk, telling José and two constables, whom he had summoned from the village, to be in readiness to come to him whenever the signal gun was fired, indicating the different routes that they were to take to make a capture the most likely.

Sunset came, and another hour passed, when a single report called the watchers; but as they circled in the direction of the sound, they did not meet the flash of Stead's dark lantern as agreed, and heard no crash of bushes as of men in sudden flight,—nothing but darkness and deep silence.

José, the half-breed, bloodhound by nature, with even more of the animal instinct than human intelligence, the outcome of the trailing instinct coupled with much adventure, at once scented calamity. Was the gun the master's or was it another's? To him it had a heavy, muffled sound, and besides, it was not the discharge of both barrels, as agreed upon.

Returning quickly to the lodge, he seized the lantern and a flask of brandy, and locating the foot-path his master had purposed to take, stole carefully along it, the others following in his wake.

Suddenly he paused and lowered the lantern; before him, stretched between two trees, was what is called a foot-snare, a thin, stiff cord, well-nigh invisible, which

was fastened across the path between the trees at such a height as to the most surely throw the passer. José cut this with a muttered curse and hurried on. Twenty yards farther he found another; still following the path, his nostrils began to quiver and his eyes to dilate, as if he felt a presence he could not see. A low groan made him bound forward, and he almost fell upon the form of his master, doubled upon the ground, head upon breast, where, in coming up the path, the third snare had thrown him.

Raising him in haste, one of the men stepped backward on his gun, and lo! the tale was told. The lurch of the sudden fall had reversed the weapon and pitched it against a tree bole, which, striking the cocked hammer, had discharged the gun, shooting its owner in the chest.

Laying him on the moss, José attempted to stanch the bleeding, which came also from the lips. "It is the lungs," he muttered, and making the sign of the cross above his master, he poured some brandy down his throat, giving a grunt of satisfaction when it was swallowed. Awkward in emergency, yet the constables made stalwart bearers, and between them, guided by José, they carried Stead — now truly Silent — to the lodge, pausing now and then to reassure themselves, by his laboured breathing, that he was alive.

Once there, José used all the skill of the half-savage

to make his master comfortable, one of the men bearing him company, while the other, leaving the rig in which they had come to Windy Hill, took Stead's horse Manfred and rode against time for the Gilead doctor, who, also being a hunter and a firm friend of both men, telegraphed to Dr. Russell before starting on his drive.

* * * * *

The next morning, when news of the accident reached the homestead, Brooke was already on her way by train to Gordon to buy the weekly supplies according to her habit, and Mrs. Lawton, driven by Adam, wild with grief at the calamity to this friend, started for Stead's home.

Arriving at Windy Hill by ten o'clock, they found Dr. Russell there, so that, with Dr. Love and José, who would not leave his master's side, as nurse, and a coloured woman of the neighbourhood in the kitchen, material help was not needed; while as for personal sympathy, though Stead was quiet and perfectly conscious, Dr. Russell, who came into the book-strewn den to greet them, told them gently but firmly that the strain on the emotions would be most dangerous for Stead, as the wound from the scattered shot must prove fatal, rally as he might, and that he wished to arrange some business affairs as soon as might be. If later

in the day he had the strength and the desire to see his friends, they would send down a messenger.

So mother and son drove home in silence to break the news to Brooke on her return, and Mrs. Lawton cautioned Adam that it must be done most gradually, for even Brooke's mother did not know how far beyond the outward friendship her feelings might be involved, or even but what some deeper understanding was either foreshadowed or might actually bind them.

* * * * *

Dr. Russell had been alone with Stead for half an hour, José keeping jealous guard outside the door, where, lying upon the floor, he dozed lightly, worn out with the night's reflected suffering.

Gradually the heart history of the last six months was revealed to the good physician, who, half sitting, half kneeling, by the narrow bed, hands clasped before him, eyes half closed as if to shut away outside things, might easily have passed for a purely spiritual confessor. Yet in the fact of closing his eyes lay his only power to keep back tears. Twice he essayed to speak and stopped, and then said gently, "A year ago you said that you would willingly give the rest of life if you could only feel and care once more. At least that wish has been granted."

"Yes, and I rejoice in it, even now," Stead answered slowly and painfully. "What now lies before me

is to take the means and give, as far as it will do so, all that I have to secure the rest and comfort of the woman who gave me the power to care, but could not grant me more. There is paper in the desk, good friend, so now sit and write as I dictate. Black Hannah and the doctor outside shall be the witnesses."

Then came to Dr. Russell the hardest task of all, to argue with one dying, but he did not flinch. "Stop for a moment, Robert, and think, led by your new power of caring. If Brooke could not take your love, do you think that she would take your money? Would not the idea hurt that same brave tenderness that kindled you to life? Think of some other way."

"She said that there was 'some one else,' but that 'he did not know.' Some day his eyes will open, for God will not allow a steadfast heart like Brooke's to be shut out of life."

A struggle seemed to pass over Stead's face that left a blueness about the lips and the eyes, that quivered and closed. Dr. Russell gave him a stimulant and waited in silence.

Presently the eyes opened and he spoke deliberately, as one reciting a hard lesson. "Then let me leave all in trust to you for the man Brooke Lawton marries, not to be known or given until their wedding day, when you must tell him all, and if he is struggling with life, — as I have a feeling that he is, for nothing

else could keep him from such a woman, — for her sake he will take the gift as from man to man.”

“And if the day does not come, or he refuses?” asked Dr. Russell, joy at the man’s final unselfishness beaming from his face.

“After ten years, then let it become a part of the endowment of your hospital, in memory of the two Helens, my daughter and her mother.”

Thus the will was made with due regard to formality, making the doctor holder of a trust, the details of which were contained in sealed instructions to keep privacy; a certain sum being set aside to furnish the faithful José with an annuity; Stead’s lodge, guns, fishing rods, books, and furniture to Dr. Russell for his convenience as a shooting-box; his saddle-horse to Adam; and his pictures and his two dogs to Brooke herself, for these last were really the possessions he most prized. Then Dr. Love and Hannah Morley signed as witnesses, they having, as is needful, no part in the will.

* * * * *

For a short time Robert Stead seemed better, as if a load was lifted from his brain, but Dr. Russell was not deceived by it, while his heightening colour spoke of increasing fever.

About two o’clock Stead asked the time, and that he might be lifted up to see the river, that, far below in

the distance, flashed by between the trees. But his sight no longer carried. Presently he said, "Do you think that Brooke would come here for one single moment? — would it be too hard for her to bear?"

"No; I have sent the horses for her, and she should be here at once. Yes, I see them now coming up the lower hill."

Brooke entered alone, as Dr. Russell had asked, and led by him went to the bedside, gently taking the single hand that lay upon the counterpane, the other arm being bandaged at the shoulder. She knew by Dr. Russell's face that there was perfect mutual knowledge, and that she might be herself without fear of misunderstanding.

Slipping down to her knees, to relieve the tension of stooping, neither spoke, for what is there to say when each knows the other's grief and helplessness? Stead fastened his eyes upon her face with fading vision that still saw through and beyond.

"I cannot see the River Kingdom, it has faded from me, but you have come to me from it," he said at last. Then looking toward Dr. Russell, he added, "Open the window, please, that I may hear the rushing of the water."

"You could not hear it, there has been no rain this fall and the river is still; it is only in the spring flood

that the waters rush noisily," answered Dr. Russell, watching the man apprehensively.

Again a space of silence, and Stead murmured, "What was that about still waters? — a hymn or prayer or something of the sort. I used to know it when I was a little chap — my mother taught it me!"

Dr. Russell glanced at Brooke. Did she understand, and could she bear the strain and answer? Yes, — leaning forward, she repeated softly, close to his ear: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me —"

Here the grasp of Stead's hand tightened, so that she paused abruptly, and turning toward her, he cried — "Child, child! that is what you have done — you have restored my soul to me!" and answering the unconscious appeal in the pleading eyes, Brooke, without hesitation, kissed him on the lips. Then, obeying a sign from Dr. Russell, she arose and passed quickly from the room.

The next day Robert Stead died, and to Brooke it seemed as if a hush must fall over all the River Kingdom, — the hawks stop sailing to and fro, the keen October wind rest from blowing, and the meadow-larks in the low fields cease their song. Yet it was not so, for this is not the law of life, which must forever be triumphant over the other law.

After a time people who had missed and wondered about Stead and Brooke concluded that they had been mistaken; the little gifts of the will were the natural ones to friends and neighbours, and the trust placed in Dr. Russell's hands was natural, and doubtless for charity, and there was no one in the Hill Country who would deny his fitness to hold it.

CHAPTER XX

FIRE OF LEAVES

KILLING frost had come and given the blackening touch to garden and wild hedge-row. Even the hardy chrysanthemums bowed their hoary heads, and a snow-like rime covered the river meadows every morning. The flame was already burning low in the leaf torches of the swamp maples, while the oaks changed to wine and russet slowly, with majestic dignity and pride of hardihood.

The modest crops the farm had yielded were divided, and Brooke's portion of hay, rye, corn on the cob, potatoes, and apples duly stored away under Enoch Fenton's argus eyes; while even this astute Yankee found nothing to quibble at, so generous had been Maarten's halving.

In fact, when the strange "farmer-on-shares," after the sharing time, prepared to plough up the corn stubble for burning and harrow the cleared field, Fenton laughed half derisively, and said, "It's plain to me he'll never make a farmer, — that harrowing job belongs to next year's man."

Still Maarten kept on at work, this last week of his stay, for that mysterious source "they say" had informed Adam that the man was homesick and would return to the old country, also that Bisbee knew it to be true and he had bought Maarten's portion of the crops.

So when, one afternoon of late October, Brooke, in a restless mood, looking down the fields toward Moosatuk, saw the opal smoke of burning brush, stubble, and leaves following the fence line just above the brook, while a dark figure moved in and out, stirring and feeding the flames with a trident fork, her feet followed her inclination to go and thank the man who had worked for and halved so well with her, and wish him God-speed.

Later, she herself would flit for a time, and though she desired to go, yet she dreaded it. The pleasure season itself was waning, although many of the hill people, especially at Gordon, lingered until Thanksgiving. After this, winter would quickly close in, they told her, and as Rosius would be in Washington executing some commissions, Brooke, urged by the entire household, had agreed to spend the first two winter months there with Mrs. Parks, to study animal anatomy under him.

As Brooke strolled slowly down the lane, Tatters, as usual, followed her. At first, when Adam Lawton began to walk daily about the garden, Tatters' indecision

whom to follow had been most amusing; but he had evidently worked it out to his entire satisfaction by dog philosophy, and convinced himself that the one who went farthest afield was most in need of company, so followed her as at first, mounting guard again by the master's chair the moment of her return; and though he was kind and obedient to Miss Keith, after her return, there was a decided tinge of condescension in it.

Brooke reached the line of smoke and found that the fire was north of the tumble-down wall, while Maarten was bringing rakesful of dry chestnut leaves from under the trees, beneath which they had drifted half across the hay-fields. These leaves he was using as kindling for the obstinate stubble, piled in a long line.

As the breeze veered and brought the pungent smoke toward her, Brooke walked back a few paces, dragging her feet luxuriously through the leaves, and waited for Maarten to come down the line once more, that she might speak. Then, as the time lengthened and he did not return, the idea forced itself upon her that perhaps he was keeping on the outskirts of the fire to avoid her or her thanks, either one or both, and feeling humiliated, she turned nonchalantly to cross the hay-fields toward the wood-lot, a customary walk of hers.

As she did so she scented something burning that was not the brush fire. Glancing about, she saw that a thin tongue of flame had crawled out from the brush heap,

and was licking up the dry leaves all about, and that the flaring line was scorching her wool and cotton outing gown and slowly creeping upward toward her hand. For a second she tried to beat it out; then, seeing the leaf fire spreading on every side and no way of escape save through it, she tried to call, but fear muffled her voice.

Faint as the cry was, it was heard by Tatters, who was hunting squirrels in the fence. Bounding toward her, he too felt the fire; circling it, he flew straight across the brush toward Maarten, barking in a wholly new and piercing key of pain and warning.

Running down the line, Maarten took in the situation at a glance, tried to beat the flame out with his hands, and failed. Tearing off his loose coat, he wrapped Brooke in it, and lifting her bodily, dashed over the brush and wall, setting her down at the stream's edge, where a few hatsful of water put out the fire without even blistering her finger-tips.

As he seized Brooke, crushing her to him in his speed, a fierce wave of joy that banished all fear enveloped the girl from head to foot, and when he put her down and she knew that the flames were extinguished, she was still breathing hard, and could find neither voice nor words to thank him.

Glancing at Maarten, she saw that he was bathing his scorched, sooty face and wrapping a wet handkerchief

about his hands, also that the brush fire had caught his beard and singed it all away.

At her exclamation of regret and pity, he turned, then stood upright before her with folded arms, his eyes fixed directly on hers. In the short interval the outline of his face had changed, solidified, and the firmness of mouth and chin was revealed.

Brooke's heart stood still, and then surged, in wild, clamorous beating. "Lorenz!" she cried. "Lorenz! Oh, why have I not always known you? This explains everything! Why did you come here like this? Why did you change your name and turn into a labourer?"

Her voice had an unconscious reproach in it, — or at least the man so heard it, — and a light that had gleamed through all the smut and scorch died from his eyes; while half kneeling, half crouching, on the bank among the bleached ferns and feathering seed-stalks, her hair fallen to her shoulders, bright colour succeeding the pallor of fear, looking again the gypsy ruler of the River Kingdom, Brooke waited for the explanation of the man who stood before her. Slowly it came, and the voice, from which the feigned accent was dropped, trembled at first, but grew stronger with fervour every moment.

"Why did I come? To see you! Why did I come as a farm labourer? That is to what I was born, back in the little tulip farm that I have often told you of, near

Haarlem. Also it was the only way that I might both be near and serve you. My name is my own, as was that by which you first knew me — Henri Lorenz Maarten — Lorenz being my mother's maiden name, and by it I was as often called in the days I spent with my uncle, who brought me up, as Maarten, the name of my father, who died so long ago. In Paris my friends reversed the titles, student fashion, to please themselves, and I for the time became Maarten or Marte Lorenz."

Why did he stand there, stern and aloof? Could he not read her thoughts, Brooke wondered. Did he not fathom the deep undercurrent upon which her questions had merely floated like bits of driftage?

No; what Maarten saw before him, as he looked, was that scene in the July woods — a young woman with eyes cast down, the suitor with eyes aflame pressing kisses upon her hands. That the man was dead did not obliterate the vision. Maarten had resolved to make his own confession, complete and unmistakable, and then to go his way.

Not knowing this, Brooke let her thoughts fly to him in eager questions.

"The picture! Tell me of 'Eucharistia' and the meaning of the light in it, and how you found me here when the papers said that you had gone to work and study in Brittany."

"Did they say that? I did not know it, for I came direct from home, where I had seen my mother. As to the picture, it is a long story. Shall I tell it to you now or write it down and leave it when I go? You will be chilled, perhaps, if you wait longer."

"Then you *are* going?"

"Yes, next week, my work now being done," here he glanced across the fields; "and having seen you, I must go back to my brush again, hoarding the studies I have made. Oh, yes, I have worked — between times — painting you always; such work is life to me."

"No, do not write, tell me now," said Brooke, wondering if the chill that seized upon her spirit had its source from without or from within.

"Then I will tell you if you will listen to the end." Brooke nodded assent.

Maarten drew nearer, and half sitting, half leaning against the bank, told his story.

"When I met you in the Paris studios, it was five years after I had turned my back on England and the commercial life my father's brother, a London Hollander, had planned for me. I belonged in an art country, and its traditions held me in its grip, not to be broken. I had fought my way along and worked steadily, first at home, earning some praise, and yet always when I felt success coming toward me, it passed me by. At first I thought you one of the great

flock of those young women who dabble at art, as an excuse for greater liberty, — soon I learned better. You were kind and frank; you never seemed to wait for flattery, but rather shrank from it. Presently I came to think, ‘Here is a woman to whom one may not only tell the truth, but who craves it.’ So I spoke my mind freely, as you remember on that day at Carlo Rossi’s, when, with a dozen others, you were trying to sketch a woman of the street, and catching poise and colouring admirably, the face was still a blank, because you could not fathom the meaning of her expression.”

“Yes, I remember,” Brooke whispered, half introspectively, as with hands clasped over her knee she looked down toward the river.

“I craved your friendship, and you gave it. Then the time came when it was too little for me; and I—what had I to offer? So I kept in the background; my work grew stale, and for the first time I half regretted the five years’ struggle, and might have given up save that, had I done so, my mother’s pride and pinching, that I might become a painter, would have been wasted.

“One day I went with some others from the Quarter to Fontainebleau to sketch out of doors. Three of us had resolved to enter a competition. For a week I had scarcely slept, for somewhere in my brain dwelt a picture, that was growing, yet would not focus. All the morning I had wandered about, and in the early afternoon,

leaving the others, I threw myself down under the oaks, quite in despair and wholly miserable.

“Presently I heard a footfall on the grass. Before I could turn, a cluster of cool, golden grapes dropped in my feverish hand, and looking up and backward, I saw your face, and in the smile it wore a ray of light, of inspiration, pierced my soul. Before I had awakened from the vision, you passed on and joined your scolding chaperon.

“As for me, as I lingered there, those grapes became as drops of sacramental wine. I seized my brushes and hastily caught and kept the vision as I saw it — for to me it was the divine awakening.

“For weeks I dreamed and painted as I never had done before. My comrades laughed and said, ‘Is it love or genius?’ and old Rossi shrugged his shoulders and asked, ‘What is the difference?’

“The picture finished, I sent it to the competition, and there your rich Senator both saw and coveted it. I would not sell it, — no, never! Ah, then I never thought to; but later my mother sickened, and the price would more than buy her a good annuity. I thought again, and something said, ‘*She* would have liked to help your mother, who is old and still plods on the tulip farm behind the poplars, which she will not leave;’ and I yielded, and I then resolved to follow you, — across the earth if must be, — for lacking you, my inspiration fled.

"Through Carolus Ashton, the amateur, well known in the Paris studios, I learned your whereabouts, and at the same time I chanced upon words of your swift sorrow in a paper at a fellow-artist's home.

"‘She has trouble,’ I thought. ‘Surely in some way I can aid her,’ and I sent the picture of yourself as not too bold a reminder. Your little copy of my picture coming in return, I said, ‘Now I may go; she did not resent my painting us together,’ and hope gave me wings.”

"Ashton knew that you were here from the beginning, then, and forwarded your portrait in the summer, and made no sign! How cruel!”

"Yes, he knew, and also one named Brownell; but do not condemn them, for there is a silence in such matters that is as honour among men, though almost strangers; it is as strong as woman's love. Besides, what good would it have done?”

"But the name you gave the picture? ‘Eucharistia,’” said Brooke, leaning forward.

Maarten drew closer, and almost dropping on his knees, looked in her eyes and took her hands in his, that were hardened by toil and blistered by fire of leaves, both for her sake, and said, “The word has two meanings, — ‘a sacrament,’ and ‘thanksgiving’; you had become the first to me, for this I gave the title ‘Eucharistia.’ It has become my name for you, and — I still give thanks.”

Then, dropping her hands as that other picture in its setting of July woods again crossed his inner vision, he stood, erect and proud, as one waiting inevitable sentence, yet glad in the consciousness that he had told the truth.

For a moment there was silence, and Brooke's head dropped lower, until it rested on her hands. At last Maarten regained himself: "And now that all is told, what is there more for me to do here? What more for me to say?"

Slowly Brooke struggled to her feet, for in truth her clothes were damp and heavy, though she had not before felt it. Standing there, she looked up and smiled, and once again that shaft of light went forth from her to him, as she said in yearning accents: "What more to say, Henri? All that a man may say to the woman who loves him."

"Eucharistia!" he cried, still holding back in blind amazement. "It is not parting, then, beloved, but waiting for you and work for me!"

"No; work for you *and work for me*, for what else means the awakening?" And placing her hand in his, she walked by his side along the border of the stream, while the wind carried the news throughout the River Kingdom, and Tatters, pushing himself between them, wagged his tail as he licked the blistered fingers.

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